TIME

SPECIAL EDITION

Grateful Dead

THEN. NOW. FOREVER.

60 Years: The Long, Strange, Astonishing Trip

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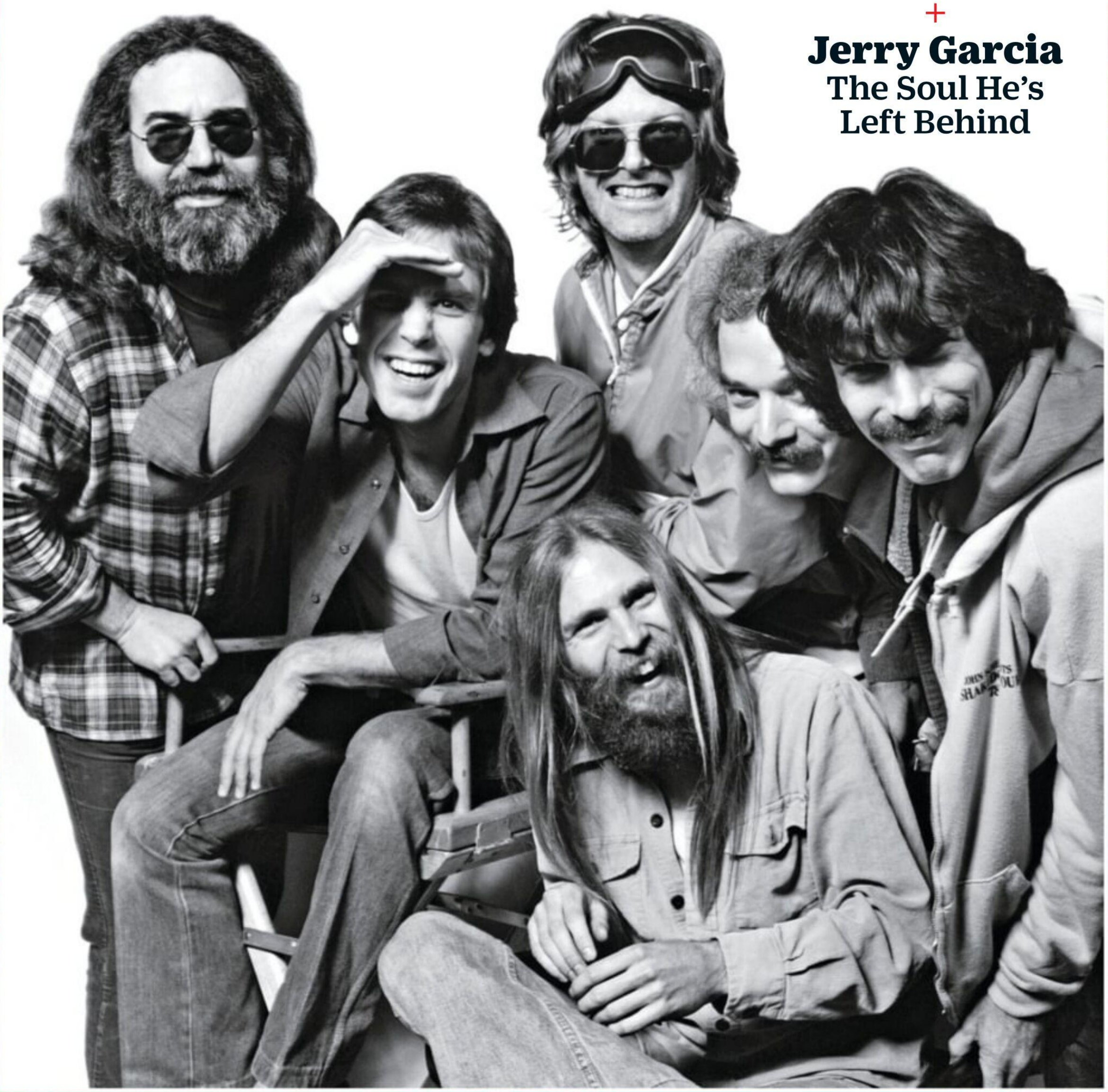
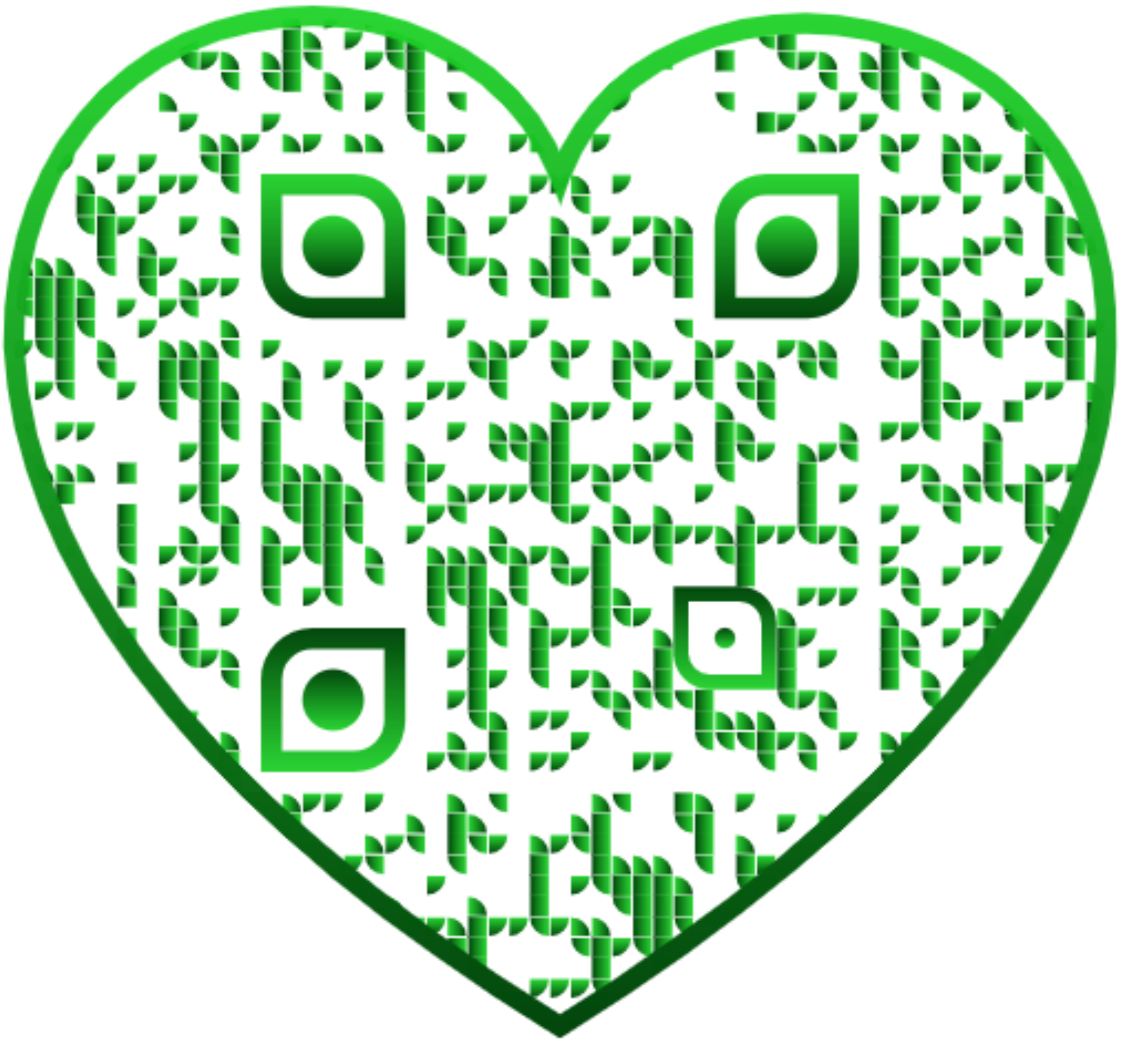
Jerry Garcia
The Soul He's Left Behind





TIME

Grateful Dead

San Francisco, 1967.

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Dead & Company packed them in at San Francisco's Oracle Park in July 2023.

60 Years On: A Sunshine Daydream

Being a Deadhead is about more than music. That's why the band has a fan base like no other, and why they are thriving today.

BY BILL SYKEN

IN 2024, NEARLY THREE DECADES AFTER the death of Jerry Garcia, the Grateful Dead unlocked a new achievement: The band broke the record for most Top 40 albums on the Billboard 200, with 59. It was surprising for several reasons. One is that the Grateful Dead were never really known for record sales—the performances were the thing, along with the community of Deadheads that gathered at those concerts. The other is that the previous mark had been shared by Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra, two mainstream titans of 20th-century music. Who would have ever thought the Dead could knock off both Ol' Blue Eyes and the King in one swoop? But they did in February 2024 with the release of an archival concert whose title does not roll off the tongue: *Dave's Picks, Volume 49: Frost Amphitheatre, Stanford U., Palo Alto, CA (4/27/85 & 4/28/85)*.

The mark says something about the modern flailings of the record industry—41 of the band's Top 40 albums have been released since 2012, and all were old concerts—but even more about the Grateful Dead. It's a tribute to the years of effort and care put in to make every concert a fresh experience. But more than that, it captures the rare dedication of the

Jerry brought the joy during a free concert at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park in 1967.

band's followers. Time marches on, and the Deadheads keep showing up.

The world is a big and complicated place, and one way to make it manageable is to find yourself a tribe. A tribe offers a sense of belonging and makes you feel you're part of something larger than yourself. The organizing principle of the tribe could be religion, or Notre Dame football, or quilt collecting. Or it could be politics—where you sometimes find the worst aspects of tribal life, with the demand to place loyalty above personal values. The tribe of Deadheads has, since its inception, strived to be the best kind of community, one that fosters individualism and lives up to the values of a band that was spawned in Northern California in the 1960s, a time and place of rare idealism.

Think of Andy Warhol's painting *Campbell's Soup Cans* from 1962 and everything it represented about the consumer culture of the post–World War II era. Then think about the Grateful Dead and how they are the complete opposite of that. There was nothing repetitive about the Grateful Dead, nothing canned. The band's performances, all 2,300-plus of them, did not roll off the assembly line. Each one was markedly different from any other. It's why the most hardcore fans could go to show after show and spend their summers following the Dead. Later in this issue, a writer picks his favorite concerts, and two of them are performances in Washington, D.C., on consecutive nights. It's why seeing one Dead show was never enough.

The concerts were not only a place to take a deep dive into the music, but also into yourself—perhaps under the influence of psychedelic drugs, or perhaps not. But the experiences people shared at these shows are at the heart of the pull the band exerts. In the 1990s, Rebecca Adams of UNC-Greensboro, a leading scholar in the emerging field of Deadology, surveyed Deadheads and found that more than half of them had traveled at least 800 miles to see a concert—so, say, New York to Atlanta, or Chicago to Oklahoma City. That mind-boggling statistic demonstrates the lengths that people will go to when they just might have the greatest night of their life.

And who were these Deadheads? They're not always who you think. For every glass blower in Marin County, there's a finance whiz on Wall Street. Perhaps the ultimate stereotype buster was Bill Walton, who went to his first show in 1967 at age 15 and became as devoted a Deadhead as there was. But that didn't stop him from massive success as a competitive athlete. In between attending 859 Dead shows, Walton, who died in May 2024, won two college basketball championships and two NBA championships. "I became the basketball player that I was because of the Grateful Dead," Walton said in a 2016 interview with *Salon*. "I am the human being that I am today because of the Grateful Dead. They're right there at the top of my teachers. Their inspiration moved me brightly."

> Time marches on, and the Deadheads keep showing up.

EARLY ON IN THE DEAD'S EXISTENCE, IT became clear that their fans were different. In 1971, when the band was really starting to take off following the success of the albums *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty,* noted music critic Robert Christgau reported in the *Village Voice* on a Grateful Dead show he attended at the Felt Forum in New York City. He used the term "Dead head" to describe the band's fans, whom he characterized as "heavy music proles and suburban folkies and old rock and rollers." These Deadheads also liked to dance, he observed, and they revered the band in a way that felt different and new. They were participants in the experience. Wrote Christgau of the typical fan lost in the music, "If Jerry beams his cosmic grin down at someone, he/she will not shriek like a 12-year-old chickie at the TAMI Show, but just boogie harder." These fans, he also noted, knew each other from other shows. "Regulars greeted other regulars, remembered from previous boogies, and compared this event with a downer in Boston or a fabulous night in Arizona," he wrote.

Christgau's early snapshot of the Deadhead came at a time when the term was gaining momentum. It notably appeared on the sleeve on the 1971 live album *Grateful Dead*. The band had included a note that encouraged fans to write in if they wanted to receive a newsletter, and the mailing address was "Dead Heads, P.O. Box 1065, San Rafael, California."

Deadheads at their best carry on the band's hippie ideals. Left: The first issue of Dead Relix, *a newsletter created by fans for the sharing of concert tapes.*

The newsletter is one of the early examples of how canny the Dead were in building a community, to the point that today you can find a plethora of articles about marketing lessons that companies could learn from the band. The January 1972 edition contained a prescient suggestion from Jerry: "Everybody ought to think of ways to get together with other Dead Freaks."

The "Dead Freaks" were already getting together not just at shows but in other forms, including through a DIY publication called *Dead Relix,* started by fans in 1974. The purpose of *Dead Relix* was to create a forum where Deadheads could trade tapes of their favorite shows. This practice of taping shows and collecting them all, like cosmic bubblegum cards, became an essential element of the Deadhead experience. While many bands discourage pirated recordings, the Dead actively encouraged the taping and eventually set up special sections at the shows to keep tapers out of the way of the regular concertgoers who wanted to shake it to "Sugaree" without having to worry about knocking over anyone's microphone.

Dead Relix, in the spirit of the band, was about sharing, not capitalizing, and a statement of values in its debut issue included the admonition "The publisher and editor of this magazine in no way advocate the duplication of live recordings for purposes other than free exchange." In other words, the issue was all about fans such as Robin, who in that inaugural issue expressed hope that he or she might find their personal pot of gold at the end of the rainbow—tapes of the Dead's Des Moines shows from 1973 and 1974.

Today, of course, fans can find any show they want online, and they do so with impressive dedication. Visit the music section of the free digital library

Sphere in Las Vegas was all psyched up for the Dead & Company residency that started in May 2024.

archive.org and you'll see that the Grateful Dead are the only band listed as its own category. With a few clicks, you can listen to the Iowa State Fairgrounds show of June 16, 1974, when the band delivered a searing version of "China Cat Sunflower," the kind of magic moment that had Robin and so many other fans eagerly trading tapes, looking to relive a peak experience, or get a taste of one they had heard the rest of the community buzzing about.

In May 2024, in Las Vegas, the multi-billion-dollar concert venue Sphere welcomed Dead & Company, which features original band members Bob Weir and Mickey Hart, and also John Mayer. Dead & Company was the third act to have a residency there, following U2 and Phish. The booking logic goes beyond the venue's video walls being tailor-made for a psychedelic visual experience: When you're launching a big new concert venue, you book a band whose fans will come.

The same logic is why, in most major cities in the United States, on any given weekend, if you wanted to go out and to hear a band honoring the legacy of Grateful Dead, you probably could. You might be lucky enough to catch a national touring act such as the Dark Star Orchestra, but more likely you would be in the hands of a local tribute band such as, say, Grateful Dads of Newport Beach. The California city is part of that band's name to help distinguish them from the Grateful Dads of Santa Cruz.

This army of cover bands is a further tribute to the Dead community. Fans go to these performances not just to hear the music but to be around other Deadheads. It's like when you're new in town and you want to meet like-minded people: Some might head to a church or another place of worship. That's kind of what's happening with the Dead tribute bands, except instead of "Ave Maria" you hear "Box of Rain," and maybe you'll find direction around some corner where it's been waiting to meet you.

You can actually find lively debate online over the question of whether the Grateful Dead have such a hold over their audience that they qualify as a cult. The main rebuttal argument is that for all the devotion the Grateful Dead have inspired from their followers, they have never abused it. As one defender said when the question was debated on Reddit, "A cult asks something of you, what the Dead asked of you is to be just as much a part of the show as they are." Another pushed back on the idea that the band's followers had dropped out of life, saying, "You could argue that they dropped into life … they followed their bliss."

The Grateful Dead had their flaws, of course. Some albums disappointed, and the group was not in peak form for every show, especially toward the end. The Sphere shows are not cheap. But for more than half a century, the vibes have remained pretty consistent. And that's why, all these years later, when the call goes out, the tribe still gathers.

Stages of Development

The Grateful Dead were all about their performances,
from their earliest days to their years as certified sensations.

August 13, 1967
Ann Arbor, Michigan
The Dead were starting to build a national following when they played the bandshell at West Park, the year their first album was released.

FREEDOM M O
EW HITE N O
JOY PHOENIX

March 3, 1968
San Francisco
This free concert in the Haight appropriately included the song "Dancin' in the Streets."

March 18, 1977
San Francisco

The Deadheads were grooving at one of the 59 shows the band played at Winterland from 1968 to the venue's close in 1978.

July 19, 1987
Eugene, Oregon

The Dead, who frequently covered Bob Dylan in concert, united with their fellow icon for a six-city tour that included this stop at Autzen Stadium.

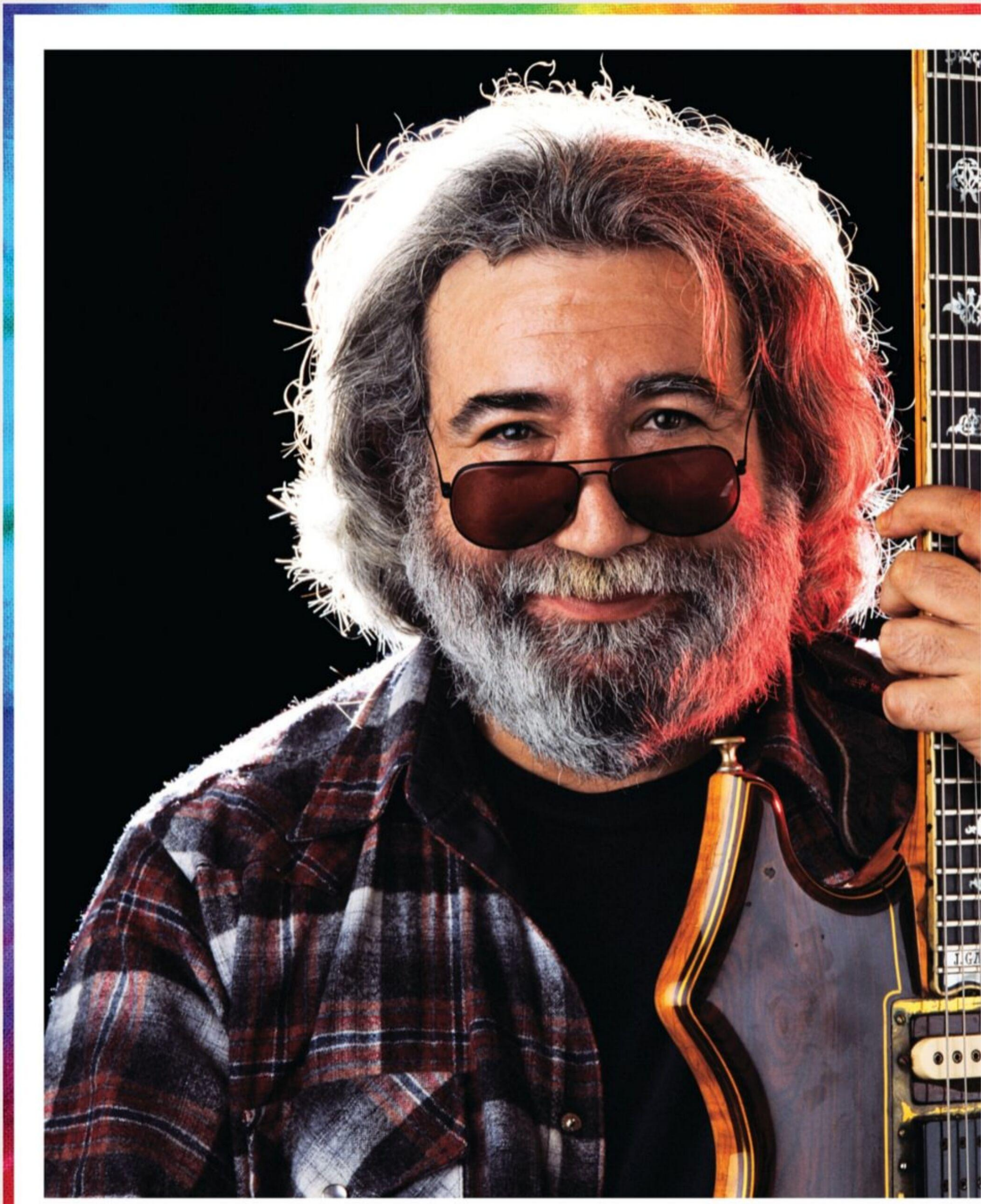
CHAPTER 1

Meet the Dead

This band was the result of a meshing of dynamic personalities, including a reluctant leader, a musical virtuoso, two dedicated lyricists, and a force of pure id who—like several members of the group—would be gone too soon.

BY JED GOTTLIEB

Phil Lesh, Bill Kreutzmann,
Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir,
and Ron "Pigpen" McKernan
in the early days.



Jerry Garcia

"OUR AUDIENCE IS LIKE PEOPLE WHO like licorice," Jerry Garcia famously said. "Not everybody likes licorice, but the people who like licorice really like licorice."

A nice encapsulation of Deadheads, the metaphor also describes people's feelings about Jerry's guitar playing. People either hate his style or they really, really like it. Among those in the latter camp: Bob Dylan.

"There's no way to measure his greatness or magnitude as a person or as a player," Dylan said in tribute to his friend after Garcia's death in 1995. "There are a lot of spaces and advances between the Carter family, Buddy Holly, and, say, Ornette Coleman, a lot of universes, but he filled them all without being a member of any school. His playing was moody, awesome, sophisticated, hypnotic, and subtle.... He really had no equal."

Jerome John Garcia was born August 1, 1942, in San Francisco. His musical path could have been very different—his mother gave him an accordion for his 15th birthday. Thankfully, he convinced her to swap it for a guitar.

Early on in his musical career, Garcia's approach leaned heavily on the blues (check out the 1966 single "Don't Ease Me In"). But by the time of the Grateful Dead's 1967 debut LP, he had embraced the weird and wonderful psychedelic revolution. The group's interpretations of blues standards split the difference between rootsy and otherworldly.

His work in the studio could be strong, sometimes inspired (much of 1969's *Aoxomoxoa* is pure freaky gold). But Garcia took flight in live settings. He rejected attempts to identify him as the band's leader, but there's no denying that his presence dominated Dead shows. From the labyrinthine knot of notes at the heart of "Dark Star," to the bounce and buoyancy of an effervescent "Franklin's Tower," to the honky-tonk groove of "Brown-Eyed Women," he made magic nightly.

But as loose, jazzy, and downright odd as his amplified solos could be, Garcia could pick on his acoustic guitar with a delicate grace. He spearheaded an Americana revival in the '70s through his collaborations with Dead lyricist Robert Hunter. Informed by Appalachian folk and bluegrass, Garcia's sweet melody lines and chords paired with Hunter's words to build a timeless catalog of songs.

Garcia would be comfortable with a half-dozen styles. Branford Marsalis, the jazz saxophonist who played a handful of shows with the Dead, said of Jerry, "It was a joy to play with him, but it was actually more of a joy to listen to him. His songwriting was very much like his playing. It was quirky, and that's what I enjoyed about listening to his songs."

In addition to leading the Dead, Garcia performed in many side projects, the most notable of which was the Jerry Garcia Band. That group, which formed in 1975, was known for both its originals, such as "Rubin and Cherise," and covers, including "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved by You)" and "The Harder They Fall."

But whatever Jerry was playing, and whether he was doing it in front of 50,000 fans or in an acoustic studio session, he always sounded like himself. Unassuming and self-effacing, he had the talent to rest not just a band but an entire movement on his shoulders.

At age 53, Garcia, who had battled heroin addiction for years, died of a heart attack during a stay at the Serenity Knolls Treatment Center in California.

Bob Weir

"THE OTHER ONE," BOB WEIR HAD the unenviable job of standing beside Jerry Garcia in one of the world's most iconic bands. He met the challenge with nuanced rhythm guitar, bold vocals, excellent jean shorts, and an absurd amount of amazing songs.

Born in San Francisco on October 16, 1947, Weir met Garcia on New Year's Eve 1963, when Weir was still a teenager. He invented his own guitar style, finding space between Garcia's exploratory leads and Phil Lesh's unconventional basslines. Over hundreds of shows, Weir learned how to counter Jerry's lilting vocals with strong shouts, cries, and growls. But his greatest accomplishment was keeping pace with Garcia's songwriting.

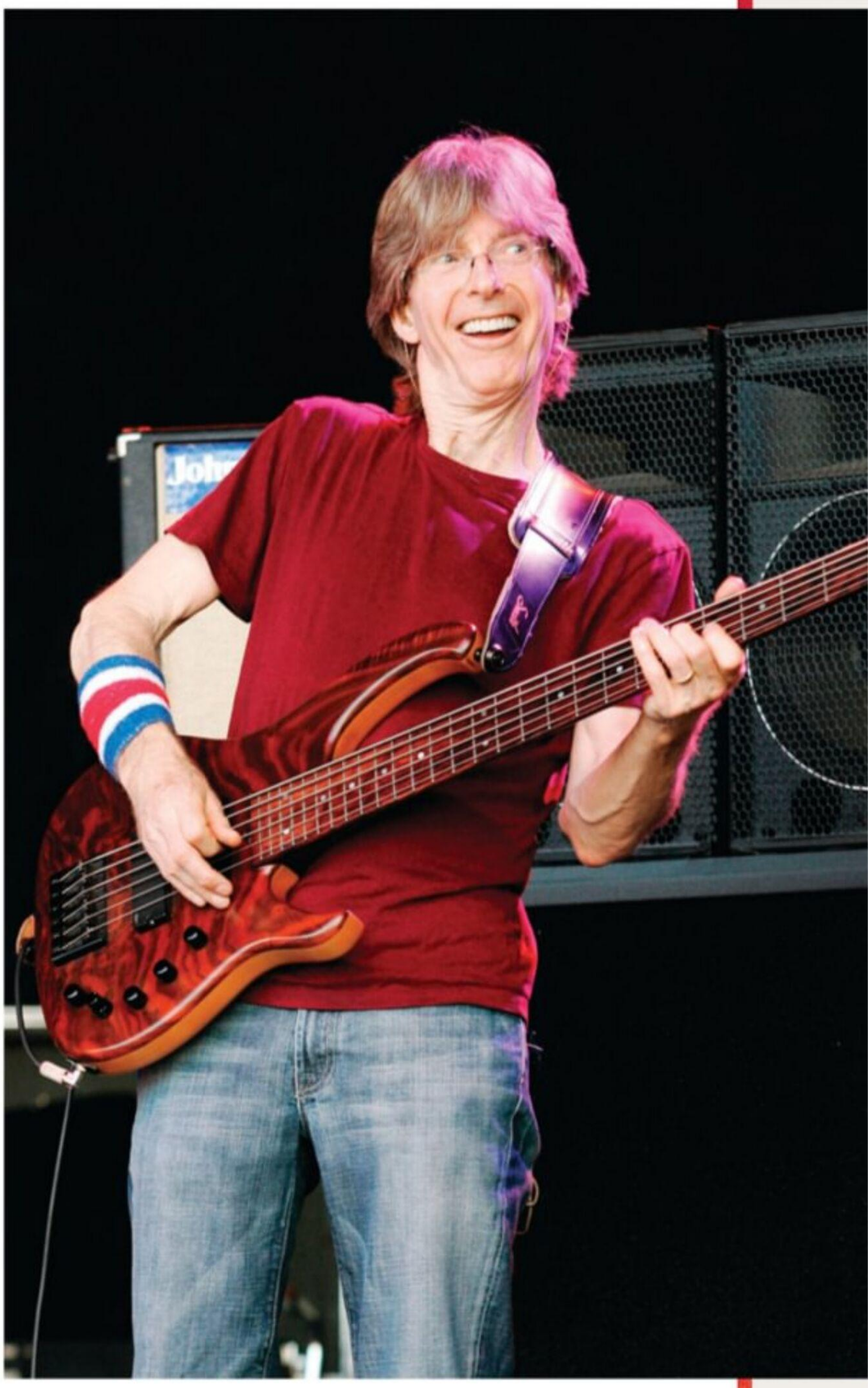
Occasionally working with Robert Hunter but more often with lyricist John Perry Barlow, Weir conjured songs built to last. Any Deadhead plotting out their miracle set list will include a deck stacked with Weir aces. Often his songs would be high-tempo rock and roll workouts and ecstatic singalongs: "One More Saturday Night," "Playing in the Band," "Sugar Magnolia."

Yet Weir proved endlessly adaptable. He could make a cover completely his own (see Marty Robbins' "El Paso"). He could write with exceeding tenderness, "Cassidy" being a key example, or get as out there as anyone—Weir howling over the sonic squall in "That's for the Other One" on the 1968 album *Anthem of the Sun* is surely one of psychedelic rock's pinnacle moments.

Despite being the band's youngest member, Weir graduated into becoming co-frontman with Garcia. As keyboardist Ron McKernan's health deteriorated, the spotlight found Weir when his songwriting was coming into its own. After Jerry followed Pigpen down the road of excess, the focus on Weir only increased. When Garcia died, much of the scene looked to him as their leader.

Like Jerry, he never took the bait, always understanding that collaboration is key to what the Dead and its offshoots do. But in projects with his old bandmates and with a wide range of younger talents, from keyboard whiz Jeff Chimenti to pop star John Mayer, he's also vigorously kept the flame alive.

Phil Lesh



A BERKELEY KID WITH BIG EARS, Phil Lesh had a whole musical life before the Grateful Dead. Born March 15, 1940, making him a few years older than the rest of the guys, Lesh studied classical violin, then jazz trumpet, then avant-garde composition before joining the band. He brought all of his studies and more to his role as the Dead's bassist, even though he'd never played bass before Jerry asked him to come aboard.

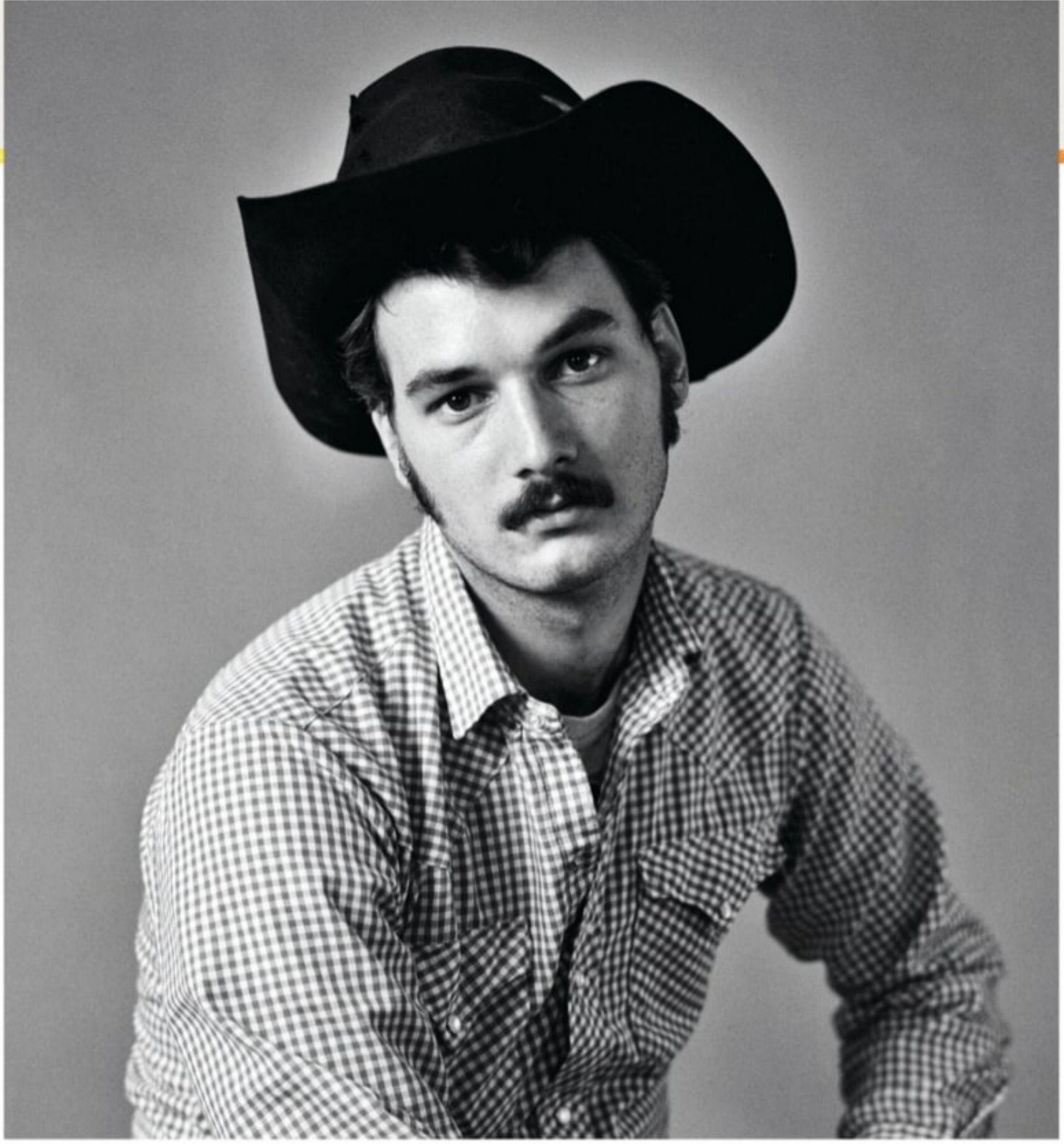
"Musically, the quest never ends," Lesh said. "Music is an infinite process, and that's what holds the attraction. You'll never get to the end of it, so you can never be bored with it."

There were certainly no boring Lesh basslines. Actually, there were very few basslines at all, at least in a traditional sense. Lesh didn't think of himself as part of the rhythm section but as a counterpoint to the guitar melodies and improvisations. Listen to his trippy, slippery low-end lines on "Scarlet Begonias" from *Cornell 5/8/77* to hear how he found a distinctive space of his own between Jerry and Bob.

Lesh's love of music and artistic restlessness can be heard in his compositions, many of which are essential Dead tunes. Often writing with Garcia and Mickey Hart, Lesh's gems could be densely complex and tangled, beautiful messes all at once—side two of the 1969 concert album *Live/Dead* highlights two of his best with "St. Stephen" and "The Eleven."

Then again, sometimes he could be more straightforward (although never completely without curves). Two very different songs, "Box of Rain" and "Passenger," both feel sublimely simple and still feature unusual twists.

Lesh's brimming enthusiasm for the music never stopped, though that didn't mean he wanted to constantly retread the past. He has split his post-Jerry years between standing on stage with his old bandmates and taking his Phil & Friends project into the deep end, mixing Americana, Southern rock, jazz fusion, and genre-free sonic spaces with a cast of nearly 100 rotating members.



Bill Kreutzmann

BILL KREUTZMANN HAD A COUPLE things going for him in 1965: He could play drums and had a station wagon big enough for the band's equipment. But when the Palo Alto native joined what was then called the Warlocks, he had no interest in folk or jug band mellowness.

Born April 7, 1946, Kreutzmann started drumming in junior high (in seventh grade, author and psychedelic pioneer Aldous Huxley overheard him practicing at school and encouraged him to keep up the good work). By his late teens, he was gigging with an R&B band in the Bay Area that did James Brown and Ray Charles covers. As the 1960s became the Sixties, he felt the pull of freer music and sat behind the kit for every one of the more than 2,300 Dead shows.

"He always sounds like a humble magician who's not afraid to lose the beat for the bigger musical picture," modern jazz drummer Billy Martin said of Kreutzmann.

And sometimes losing the beat was the point.

Kreutzmann never lost his bar-band thump. And those chops came in handy during the short stretches when he was the only Dead drummer—listen to the way he could keep time and swing all at once on rockers such as "Cumberland Blues" and "One More Saturday Night" on the *Europe '72* album.

But getting lost in the music, especially for the drummers, became part of the live experience. When Kreutzmann paired with Mickey Hart, the two of them started to explore tag-team drum solos that would become hallmarks of the second set by the late '70s. Certfied drum god Neil Peart of Rush described the pair as an "interlocking, mutually complementary rhythmic unit."

Mickey Hart

AT THE AGE OF 10, WHILE GROWING up in Brooklyn, Mickey Hart—born Michael Steven Hartman on September 11, 1943—discovered an old drum pad and pair of sticks of his dad's in a closet. His mom, also a drummer, started to give him lessons. "From the age of 10 all I did was drum," he said. "Obsessively. Passionately. Painfully."

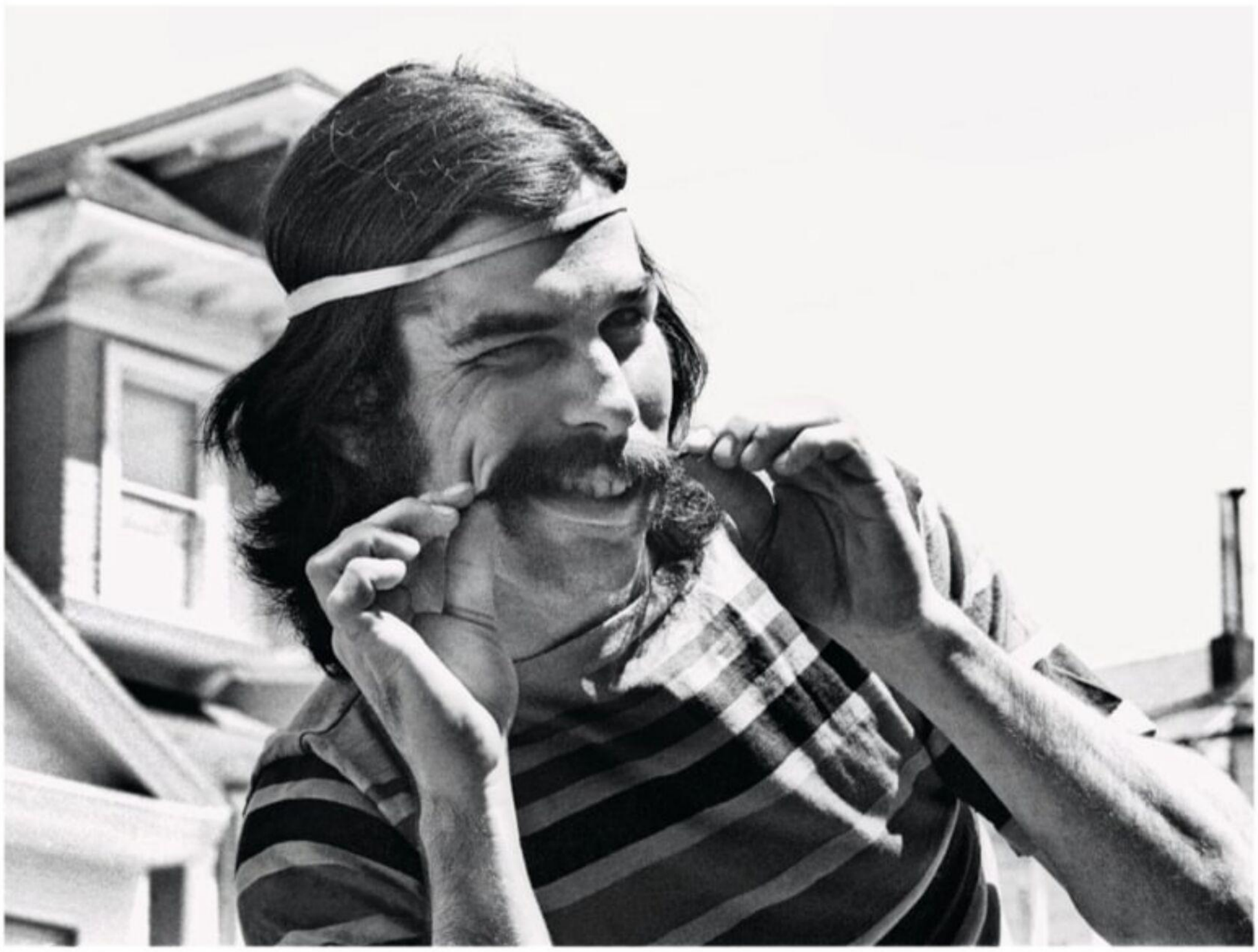
By the mid-'60s, Hart had logged a chunk of time behind the kit for a top-notch Air Force jazz band. But his path on the straight and narrow took a hard turn when he met Kreutzmann in 1967 and began sitting in with the Dead. Like Kreutzmann, his early playing was traditional. That changed as Hart began studying drum traditions from around the world and pulling them into the band's jams.

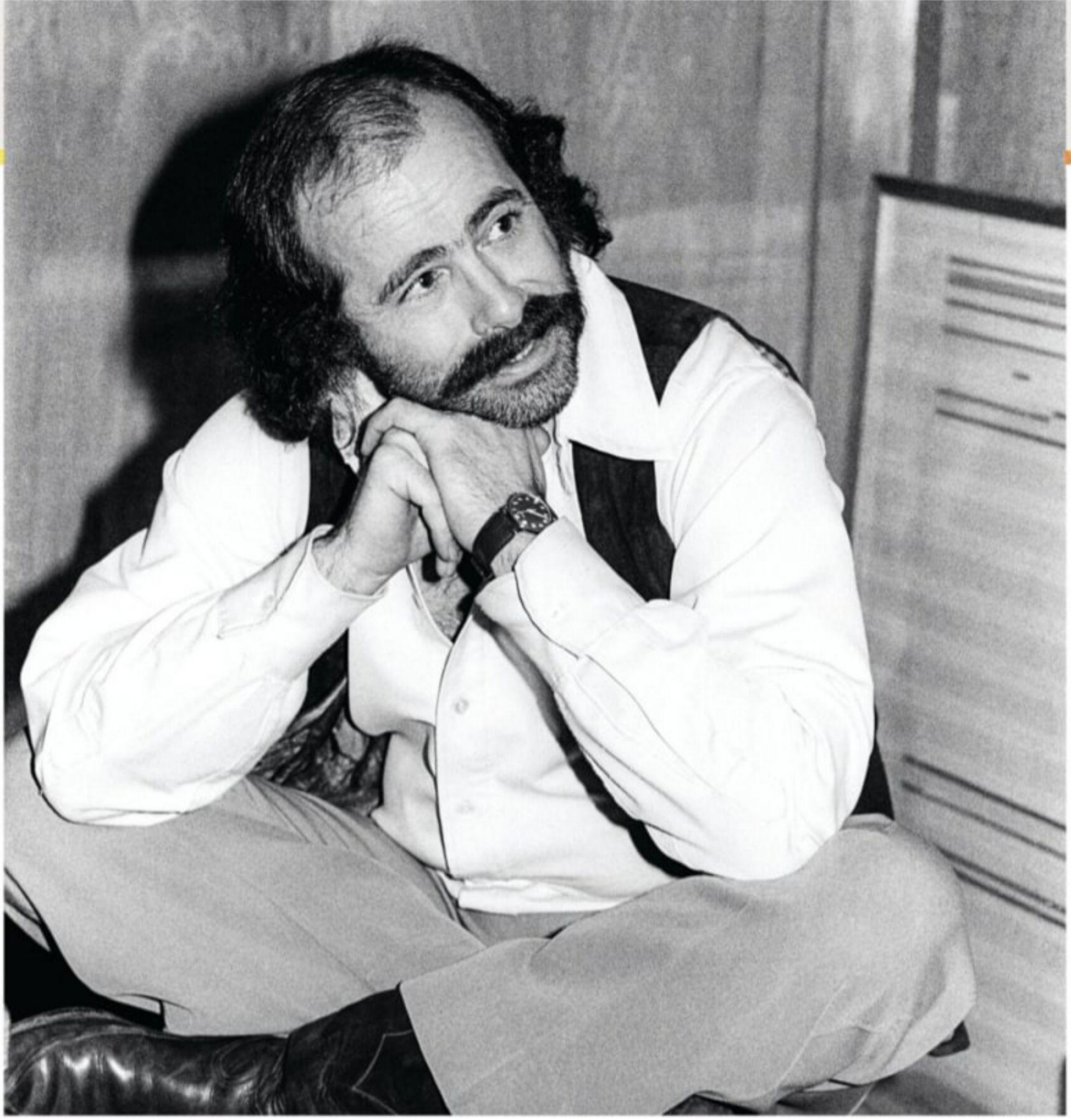
The two stretched live staples such as "Alligator," "The Other One," and "The Eleven" into drum workouts. Sometimes their bandmates swirled around them. Other moments, Hart and Kreutzmann charged ahead. During these improvisations, Kreutzmann often anchored the music while Hart toyed with polyrhythms.

Hart indulged in flourishes that nodded to classical Indian percussion. He would abandon his stool to pound on hand drums. He modified his kit with drums and cymbals still foreign to rock and roll.

After some financial shenanigans involving Hart's dad during his time managing his son's band, Hart left for a few years in the early '70s. After his return, he and Kreutzmann began pushing their breaks toward what would be called "Drums>Space," which became a ritual of nearly every Dead show post-'77. Hart began customizing the band's percussion setup beyond what anyone could imagine—see what became known as The Beam, an eight-foot aluminum beam strung with piano strings.

For those who couldn't get enough of the nightly set-two freak-outs, on the side, Hart (sometimes with Kreutzmann, sometimes without him) gave performances spanning Latin percussion, Southern and East Asian drum styles, worldbeat fusion, atonal drones, and indigenous chanting.





Robert Hunter

THE GRATEFUL DEAD'S MUSIC cataloged moods, vibes, visions, and fantasies. The band could be downright rustic, drift like spirits through the astral plane, or barrel down the tracks like a freight train. Primary lyricist and chief Garcia colaborator Robert Hunter put words to each incarnation, each distinctive energy and emotion.

Born June 23, 1941, in Arroyo Grande, California, Hunter began freeing his mind during the culturally conservative early '60s—he volunteered for CIA-sponsored experiments with hallucinogens at Stanford University in 1962. The drugs opened up his writing.

"The words jumped from sub-conscious to the page," Hunter said.

His trips inspired some out-there lyrics: "Can you answer? Yes I can, but what would be the answer to the answer man?" But he also tapped into the American mythos like Bob Dylan and Robbie Robertson had done before him.

After performing with Garcia in an acoustic duo that predated the Dead, Hunter was invited by Garcia to write lyrics for the band in the fall of '67. His characters, scenes, and stories came to define the Dead. There was St. Stephen with a rose going in and out of the garden. And Sugar Magnolia with everything delightful. And Uncle Sam hiding out in a rock and roll band.

The rogues' gallery (Tennessee Jed, Cosmic Charlie, Bertha, Sugaree, Althea…) and their crimes, indiscretions, loves, and losses gave shape to the world of the Dead. Hunter's words transported fans to silver mines, city streets, a cave up in the hills, and the surface of the moon. So many of the band's signature slogans come from Hunter lyrics: "What a long strange trip it's been," "I will get by/I will survive," "Once in a while you get shown the light/In the strangest of places if you look at it right." He died in 2019 at age 78.

Ron “Pigpen” McKernan

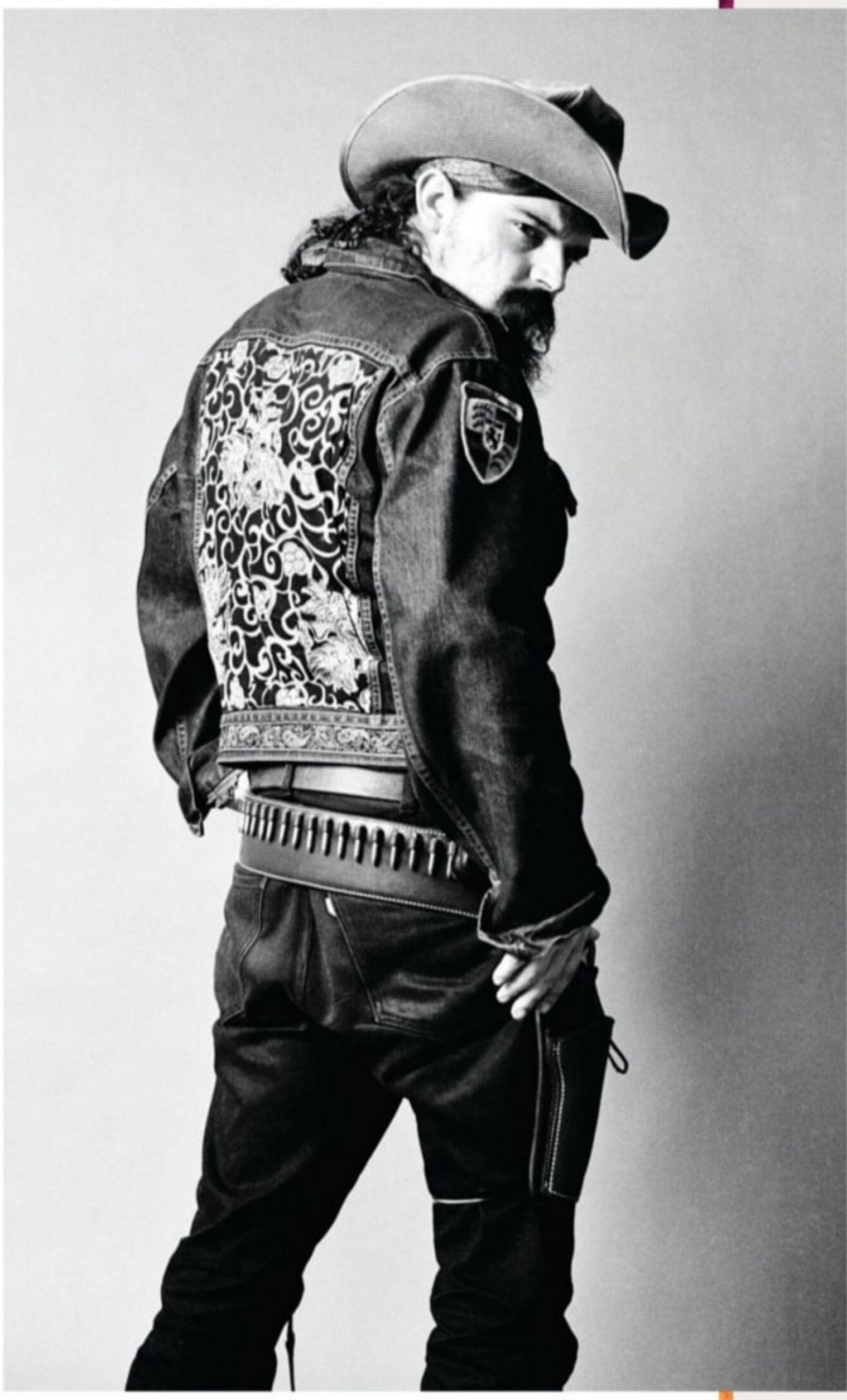
THE GRATEFUL DEAD MIGHT HAVE never come to life if it weren’t for Ron McKernan. This blues- and soul-loving kid (his dad was an R&B DJ) suggested a bunch of folkies and bluegrass cats plug in and get loud.

Born September 8, 1945, in San Bruno, California, McKernan was the Dead’s first frontman. Before Jerry was Jerry, Pigpen (named so for a messy life that saw a lot of excess) took control of the group with his gritty vocals, gospel-infused keys, and blues harmonica. While the other members learned to write rock classics, McKernan dug through his dad’s records for inspiration—blues standards such as “It Hurts Me Too” and “Turn On Your Lovelight” became vehicles for McKernan’s charismatic roars.

“He knew the archive of the blues as well as anyone I’d ever known,” fellow Dead keyboardist Tom Constanten said. “Pigpen went way back with the blues, which is the kind of thing you need to do if you want to get that effortless depth that is like recalling something that happened last Thursday.”

Listen to a track such as “Easy Wind.” While Hunter channeled Robert Johnson to write the tune for *Workingman’s Dead,* Pigpen gave the song its authentic classic blues feel with growling vocals and howling harmonica. When Garcia and Weir became the group’s creative forces, McKernan’s presence faded. He popped in on *American Beauty* for “Operator,” an original that grounds the dreamy album, but alcoholism had taken its toll by the early ’70s. Never a hippie, McKernan looked—and drank—like a biker.

As Pigpen’s liver failed, the band used Constanten and then Keith Godchaux to lend a hand on keys. But after the famed Europe ’72 tour, McKernan left the road on doctor’s orders. In March 1973, he died from complications due to alcoholism at the age of 27.



Keith Godchaux

IN 1971, DONNA GODCHAUX SIDLED up to Jerry at a show in San Francisco and told him her keyboard-playing husband would be perfect for the Dead. She wasn't wrong.

Classically trained, Keith gave "Mississippi Half-Step Uptown Toodeloo" and "U.S. Blues" their swinging honky-tonk swagger. He followed (or led) the band into jazz fusion and prog rock territory in live sets—see any number of "Help>Slip>Frank" performances.

"He was one of the best, if not the best, keyboardists that I've ever had the honor of playing with," Kreutzmann wrote. "He could learn songs before he was even done hearing them for the first time. And he could play just about anything."

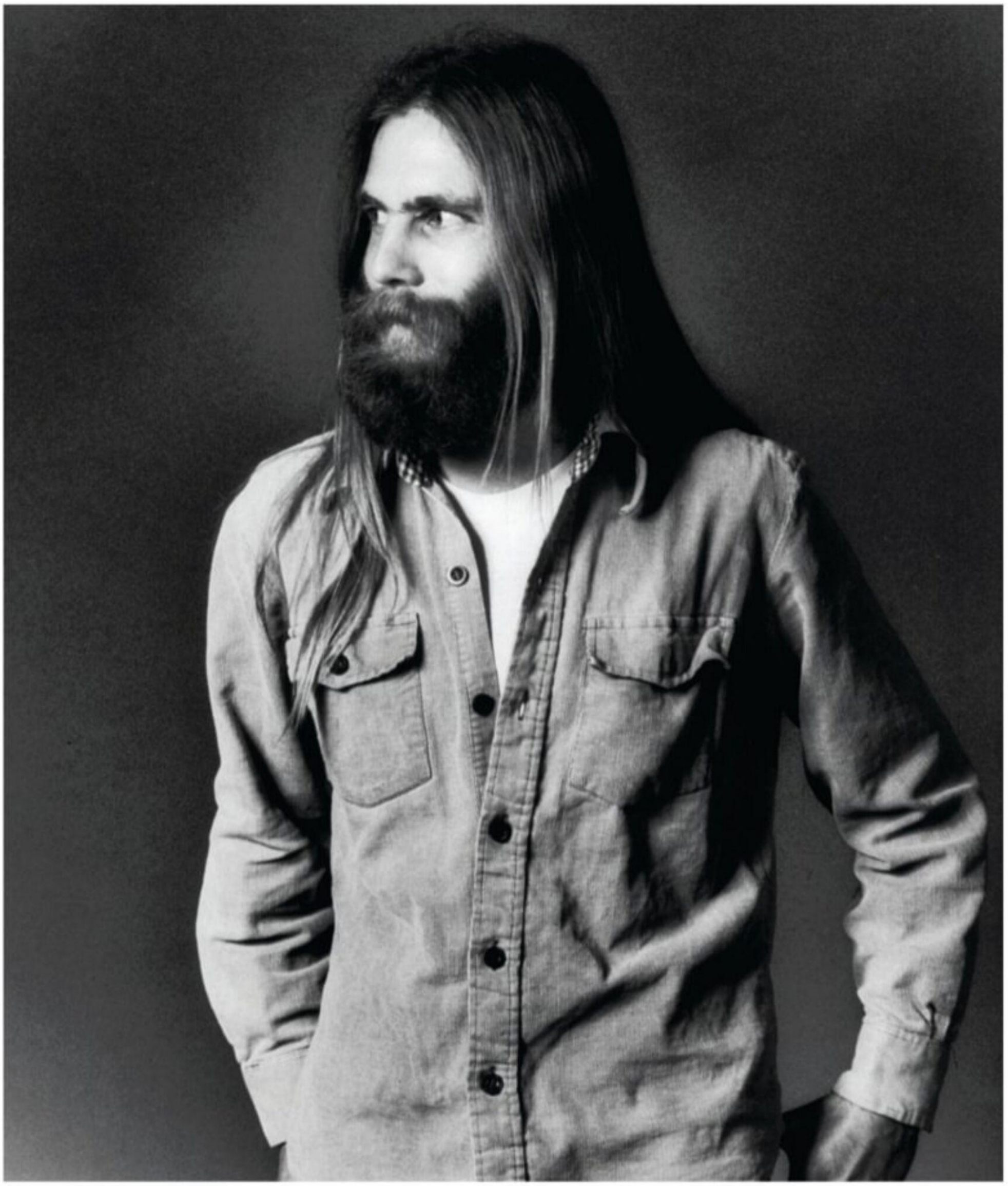
But he struggled with addiction, and the band asked him to leave in 1979. A year later, he died in a car crash in which he was a passenger.

Donna Jean Godchaux

DONNA JEAN GODCHAUX GREW UP IN the shadow of the legendary Fame recording studio in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. She started doing vocal session work at 15, and by the time she arrived in California, she'd already provided backup vocals on Elvis Presley, Percy Sledge, Neil Diamond, and Cher LPs.

Alongside her husband, Donna was part of the band's storied mid- to late-'70s run as one of the world's greatest, most unpredictable live acts. Her duet with Weir on "The Music Never Stopped" was a revered show staple, and her harmonies on "Jack Straw" added to the wistful mood of the tune.

She left the band with Keith in 1979, and they had formed the Heart of Gold Band before his death several months later. She then moved back to Alabama and in recent decades has lent her vocal talents to several of the Dead-related outfits in the post-Jerry world.



Brent Mydland

BRENT MYDLAND FILLED THE CURSED keyboard chair after working in Weir's side band in the late '70s. By the middle of the '80s, he came into his own as a singer, songwriter, and part of the band's sound.

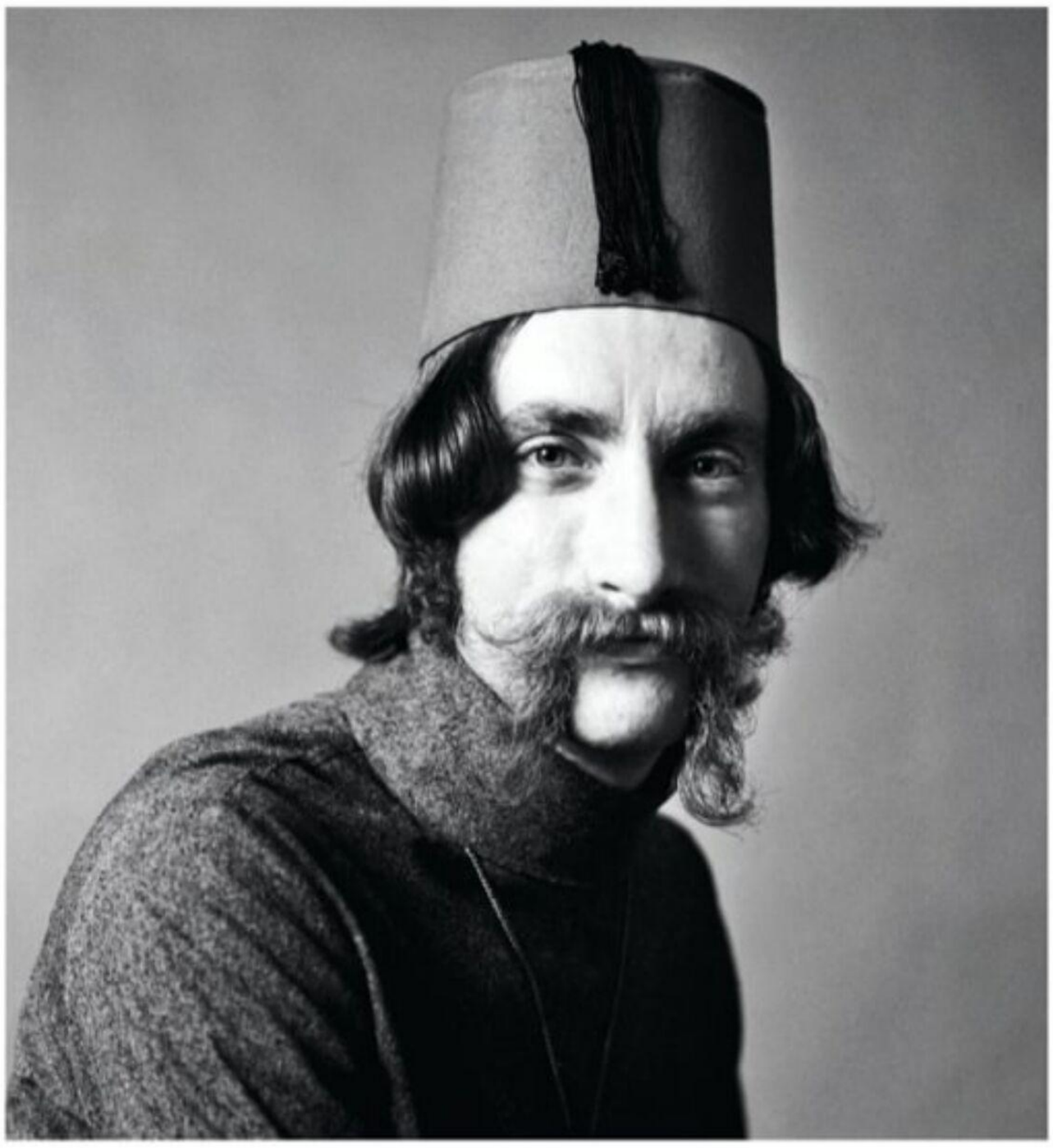
He wrote some of the Dead's tightest, most poppy tunes—"Hell in a Bucket," "Tons of Steel," "Just a Little Light." His musical chops ensured that the band never lost a step (he feels both inspired by and at ease with signature Godchaux grooves on the underrated live document *Without a Net*).

Like two of his predecessors, Mydland struggled with addiction. He died of an overdose in 1990.

Vince Welnick

VINCE WELNICK CAME FROM A very different San Francisco scene than the Dead. As a member of the Tubes in the ’70s and ’80s, Welnick keyboards powered absurdist art rock on new wave–adjacent tunes such as “Sushi Girl,” “White Punks on Dope,” and “Bora Bora 2000/ Love Bomb.”

Taking over after Mydland’s death, Welnick managed to find his own space on a few ace performances (though for a big chunk of the time he overlapped with Bruce Hornsby’s guest spots and didn’t have much room to stand out). After Jerry’s passing, Welnick wasn’t invited back for the big reunion shows. He stayed active in Dead-adjacent projects, but sadly, Welnick died by suicide in 2006.



Tom Constanten

ALTHOUGH HE WAS ONLY A MEMBER for a few years, Tom Constanten did as much as anyone to push the Dead into the psychedelic era. A pal of Lesh's from his days studying avant-garde music, Constanten learned from a wild assortment of modern classical composers in the mid-'60s. He joined the band in 1968 and provided an ethereal counterpoint to Pigpen's dirty organ.

Constanten dreamed up the avant-garde ending to "The Other One" on *Anthem of the Sun.* His freaky keys punctuated the crescendo of "St. Stephen" on the 1969 album *Aoxomoxoa.* His atmospheric playing is a huge part of what made "Dark Star" on *Live/Dead* such a legendary performance. But things didn't work as well on the road, and he amicably split with the band in 1970.

John Perry Barlow

WHILE NOT AS PROLIFIC A collaborator as Hunter, John Perry Barlow wrote some immortal lyrics as the chief songwriting partner for Bob Weir, whom Barlow had met in prep school (before Weir was kicked out). Barlow could write with gentle sweetness, as he did on "Cassidy." His songs "The Music Never Stopped" and "Estimated Prophet" tap into distinct vibes in the Deadhead scene.

In addition to being a lyricist, Barlow was an early advocate for net neutrality and wrote the influential 1996 manifesto "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace." When he died in 2018, his obituary in TIME centered on that aspect of his life. Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, said of Barlow's vision, "He imagined everybody connected, building a place of love and mutual assistance and understanding." In short, Barlow wanted the internet to be like the perfect Dead show.

CHAPTER 2

How It All Began

The Grateful Dead came to life when a rare group of individuals were fortunate enough to find one another, and the band helped ignite a San Francisco scene that would transform American culture and provide a soundtrack for the ’60s.

Tom Wolfe (right), author of The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test, *with Garcia and band manager Rock Scully in 1966.*

Left to right: Garcia, Kreutzmann, Weir, Lesh, and McKernan in 1965.

The Dead's First Days: An Oral History

It was New Year's Eve, and Phil walked into a music store where Jerry was playing banjo....

BY BLAIR JACKSON AND DAVID GANS

THIS STORY STARTS ON NEW YEAR'S EVE 1963, in Palo Alto, California, south of San Francisco, part of a web of small cities known as the Peninsula. Twenty-one-year-old Jerry Garcia had lived in the area since his release from the Army near the end of 1960. During his brief military stint (Private Garcia had some problems with authority), he learned the rudiments of finger-picking guitar from another soldier, and when he returned to civilian life, it was acoustic music that he wanted to pursue. Living in poverty on the Peninsula, he devoted most of his waking hours to mastering the guitar so he could dabble in old-time country music with friends (including future Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter), then threw himself wholeheartedly into the banjo in order to play.

One of Garcia's musical mates on the Peninsula, Ron McKernan—nicknamed Pigpen, after the unkempt Peanuts character created by cartoonist Charles Schulz—was a blues and R&B kid through and through. His father was an R&B DJ, and he grew up listening to Black music. School was never his thing; he was more interested in becoming the next T-Bone Walker or Lightnin' Hopkins. He played serviceable blues guitar, strong harmonica, and some piano. Pigpen and Garcia played a few gigs together in a rock/R&B cover band called the Zodiacs, headed by a local guitarist named Troy Weidenheimer, but they mostly stuck to acoustic performances at coffeehouses and clubs.

Boyish Bob Weir had bounced around various schools in Northern California and Colorado but never quite found his niche. Though Weir was briefly in a group called the Uncalled Four, he was still very green when he wandered into Dana Morgan Music one fateful night.

BOB WEIR (BAND MEMBER): I was with a couple of friends walking the back streets of Palo Alto on New Year's Eve at about 7:30, headed to a coffeehouse to get some music and celebrate. We heard banjo music coming out of the back of a local music store and just knocked on the door and got invited in. We knew who it was; we knew it was Jerry. He was waiting for his banjo students, and I said, "Jerry, listen, it's 7:30 on New Year's Eve, and I don't think you're going to be seeing your students tonight." He agreed and asked if we played instruments. We all eagerly nodded yes and broke into the front of the store to grab some instruments. We played all night and had a wonderful time. We decided at that point we had enough amateur talent to start a jug band; they were popular at the time. We started practicing that week and got a gig shortly thereafter. Off it went from there.

BOB MATTHEWS (GRATEFUL DEAD SOUND ENGINEER): I was trying to find a banjo teacher. My mother, who was teaching first-graders to read at a local progressive private school called Peninsula School, had a Stanford film undergraduate doing a documentary on her unique teaching, and when my mother articulated her difficulty [in finding me a banjo teacher], Sara Garcia turned around and said, "My husband teaches banjo." That's how I met Jerry.

[The day after seeing the Jim Kweskin Jug Band perform], Bob and I cut class and hitchhiked into Palo Alto to Dana Morgan Music, where Jerry was teaching. As we walked into his little cement cubicle, he was playing banjo—noodling, as he always did. I think I said, "We went to see the Kweskin Jug Band last night, and we're starting a jug band." Jerry looked up, didn't drop a beat, and said, "Good. I'm in it. I know a great harp player, this guy named Pigpen."

ROBERT HUNTER (BAND LYRICIST): I was offered the position of jug player, but I didn't have the embouchure. So I dropped out and didn't pick up performing again for about 10 years.

CONNIE BONNER MOSLEY (EARLY GRATEFUL DEAD FAMILY MEMBER): I remember in high school, the hallways would clear when Pigpen walked down the hallways—with a woman on each arm, maybe. I remember his last days at Palo Alto High School, before he was expelled, and then running into him a few months later at the guitar store.

CLIFFORD "TIFF" GARCIA (JERRY'S OLDER BROTHER): Weir and Jerry were both working at the music store. Weir was giving lessons, Jerry was giving lessons and trying to repair instruments, but he wasn't very mechanically inclined. But anything to make ends meet—[Jerry and first wife Sara] had a baby on the way. I remember seeing Bob there and hearing him play and listening to him give lessons. He was just a kid, but he was pretty good. He was still going to school at the time; Jerry was older and out of school. Anyway, when I first heard Jerry had gotten together with Weir and Pigpen, I knew it would be a good nucleus for a group.

JERRY GARCIA (BAND MEMBER) IN 1964: I think there are about four major categories of music that we actually play, and we boil it down under the name of jug band music. Actual jug band music is a sort of early blues-band music that was recorded during the '20s and '30s, not sophisticated music; it might feature guitar and harmonica played blues-style, kazoo, possibly a five-string banjo, possibly a jug, which acts as a tuba does in an old-time Dixieland band. That is one of our major areas of material, one of our sources. Another is early Dixieland; New Orleans jazz. We get some '20s, '30s popular music, and a certain amount of more recent blues, from within the last 10 or 15 years, that includes some very recent—within the last three or four

The Grateful Dead first called themselves the Warlocks but had to find a new name when they learned another band was using it.

years—rhythm and blues songs. So we have quite a large area, and it makes it more fun for us, and certainly more satisfying, because it doesn't restrict us to one particular idea or one particular style, and the result, I think, is pretty interesting, and it's great—just a gas.

I think we'll play the music probably as long as we're together. We all live in the same area. Like I say, it's fun, it's rewarding, it's great to get together. We don't expect to make a fortune at it or ever be popular or famous or worshipped, or hit *The Ed Sullivan Show* or anything like that, or the circuses or the big top, or whatever. Anyway, we play at a few places in the area. I think that we may be restricted to that, just because it's impractical to travel too long a distance. But as long as we can play, we'll play, regardless of what it's for, who it's for, or anything. It's fun for us, that's the important thing.

CAROLYN "MOUNTAIN GIRL" GARCIA (JERRY'S SECOND WIFE): The jug band was fantastic; God, they were good! Their gigs were packed and fun and really

The Grateful Dead played a debutante ball at an estate called La Dolphine in the Bay Area town of Hillsborough in 1966.

upbeat. The energy was there, and it was good, good energy. They had the Top of the Tangent [a coffeehouse in Palo Alto] rockin'. Plus, with the jug band there was the opportunity to display all kinds of crazy schtick—vaudevillian jokes and insults and banter, which also happens in some bluegrass bands.

BILL KREUTZMANN (BAND MEMBER): I saw Jerry play with Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions at the Tangent in Palo Alto. I sat right in front of him and watched him playing, and man, he had the whole place in the palm of his hand. Everybody was watching him, and he was giving off this incredibly beautiful energy. I said, "Man, I'm gonna follow that guy forever!" I just said it to myself. About three weeks later, I got a phone call. It was Jerry, saying, "Do you want to be in a band?"

WHILE MOTHER MCCREE'S UPTOWN JUG CHAMPIONS were playing the local clubs on the Peninsula, writer Ken Kesey, who had been at the center of a libertine, bohemian scene at his house on Perry Lane in Palo Alto, near Stanford University (where he had studied writing with Wallace Stegner), was increasingly dabbling in psychedelics and hanging out with a bunch of like-minded inner-space adventurers who became known as the Merry Pranksters. Kesey—and Garcia's friend Robert Hunter—had been involved in secret government-sponsored tests on the effects of psychedelics, but by 1964, the genie was out of the bottle, and LSD was finding its way to receptive groups of people in the Bay Area, Los Angeles, New York, and a few other places. Sometime in early 1965, acid found its way to Garcia's circle of friends.

DAVID NELSON (GUITARIST, NEW RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE, JERRY GARCIA ACOUSTIC BAND, AND OTHERS): I think it was Rick Shubb [Nelson's bandmate in the Pine Valley Boys bluegrass band] who found this house on Gilman Street [in Palo Alto]. It was the most wonderful place. It had a porch with brick steps. You could come out and just sit in the afternoon. There's nothing like the afternoon in Palo Alto. It's really amazing.

That's the first place that we took acid. And it was 'cause of Rick Shubb. He had a contact in Berkeley, and he said, "I can get some hits of acid." Everybody was like, "OK, I want to do it, I want to do it!" And Hunter's back there shaking his head, because he had been through this two years before that. He said, "You guys are nuts. You don't realize what you're in for."

DAVE PARKER (THE BAND'S ACCOUNTANT): In those days, you could be wandering around and feeling the weirdest way imaginable and feeling obvious, but nobody would notice. It wouldn't even occur to somebody to think that you were on drugs. We were wandering around the house and in and out of the house and walking up and down the streets and around the block, looking up at the streetlights. Police cars would go by, and they paid no attention. I remember feeling as demented and bizarre as I could imagine and then some, and yet it was all very soft and innocent walking around Palo Alto.

> "Everybody was watching [Jerry], and he was giving off this incredible, beautiful energy. I said, "Man, I'm gonna follow that guy forever!"
>
> —BILL KREUTZMANN

DAVID NELSON: Anyway, so that started the thing of, "I think we're going to go electric" [with the band]. I remember right after [the first trip] that there was a lot of buzz about it. There was a lot of talk on what we called the "trips couch" about going electric.

PHIL LESH (BAND MEMBER): I couldn't believe that was Bob Dylan on AM radio with an electric band [on "Subterranean Homesick Blues" in mid-1965]. It changed my whole consciousness: If something like that could happen, the sky was the limit.

MOTHER MCCREE'S HEYDAY, SUCH AS IT WAS, COINcided with the rise of the Beatles and, shortly after, the Rolling Stones in America. Bob Weir once commented that the Beatles made being in a rock band look "impossibly attractive," and in their early days, the Stones were driving crowds wild playing rock and roll, blues, and R&B—all of which Mother McCree's dabbled in. So in early 1965, Garcia, Weir, and Pigpen decided to start an electric band, the Warlocks. Dana Morgan Jr., son of the music-store owner, was the original bassist, and 18-year-old Bill Kreutzmann, already a well-established rock/R&B drummer in the area, was enlisted to be the skinsman.

JERRY GARCIA: Our earliest incarnation was kind of a blues band in a way. We were kind of patterned after the Rolling Stones. This was during the British Invasion. Everybody went and saw [the Beatles'] *A Hard Day's Night*—"Yeah, that looks like fun! Let's go play rock and roll!" Me and Pigpen both had that background in the old Chess Records stuff—Chicago blues like Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters, and people like Jimmy Reed, Chuck Berry. It was real natural for us, and we even did those kinds of tunes in the jug band. So it was an easy step to make it into sort of a proto-blues band. The Stones were already doing all the old Muddy Waters stuff. Remember that old Junior Walker and the All-Stars instrumental, "Cleo's Back"? That was also real influential on the Grateful Dead—our whole style of playing. There was something about the way the instruments entered into it in a kind of free-for-all way, and there were little holes and neat details in it—we studied that motherf---er! We might have even played it for a while, but that's not the point—it was the conversational approach, the way the band worked, that really influenced us.

When we first started the Warlocks, I thought, "Wow, Pigpen is this guy who can play some keyboards, some harmonica, and he's a powerhouse singer." He was the perfect frontman, except that he hated it. Getting him to do it was really a bitch. I think he was just a shy person.

SUE SWANSON (ONE OF THE BAND'S FIRST FANS): It was always Jerry's band. But Pigpen was the only one who was really a showman. He'd get out there and work the audience, and the band would be behind him. They would let him take the reins and back him up. But by no means were they a backup band for him, nor did he ever really lead them. I guess he had a lot of influence on the type of music they played, but they all had that bent, too.

BILL KREUTZMANN: We used to rehearse at Dana Morgan's Music store in Palo Alto, and we practiced there mostly because we got the instruments for free, because the bass player's father owned the music store. So after hours, Pigpen used to [take] instruments off the wall when the shop was closed, and we'd start a jam session. Those were our first rehearsals, in this little music store. I had a little drum set out there, and they'd take guitars off the wall to play. And Dana, god bless him, wasn't the best bass player, but really generous—he gave us all the instruments and never asked for them back. It was very kind.

BOB MATTHEWS: Their first gig was at Magoo's Pizza, on the main drag of Menlo Park, California. It was in May of 1965, about a month before I graduated high school—Bob Weir, by that time, had determined that high school wasn't for him—and a whole bunch of people from my high school would come down on Friday nights to hear this band, because they were a good dance band.

JERRY GARCIA: We did . . . we stole a lot of . . . well, at the time, the Kinks and the Rolling Stones' "King Bee," "Red Rooster," "Walkin' the Dog," and all that shit. We were just doing hard, simple rock and roll stuff, old Chuck Berry stuff—"Promised Land," "Johnny B. Goode"—[and] a couple of songs I sort of adapted from jug band material. "Stealin'" was one of those, and that tune "Don't Ease Me In"—it was our first single, an old ragtime pop Texas song.

The first night at the pizza place, nobody was there. The next week, when we played there again, it was on a Wednesday night, there were a lot of kids there, and then the third night there was three, four hundred people, all up from the high schools. . . . We were playing, people were freaking out.

SUE SWANSON: Jerry used to have this little Corvair, and we'd be going down to Magoo's or whatever, and I can remember he and Pig would be behind us in their car, and Matthews and I would be laughing, laughing, laughing, because they had what was for the time real long hair, and Pig had the big, droopy mustache. We called them the Ugly Sisters.

Pigpen was like a professional dirty old man. He was always there with the sexual innuendo. But at the same time, he was a total gentleman, so you knew he was kidding. I mean, he would never force his attentions on a woman who wasn't interested in him. But he always talked *dirrrrty,* so dirty. I didn't even know what he was talking about most of the time, didn't have a clue—that's how naive I was. All he did was embarrass me. That's who he was—he wore those clothes and talked that talk, but he was a very soft, sweet, gentle guy. He just had this persona.

> "The first night at the pizza place, nobody was there. The third night, there was three, four hundred people, all up from the high schools."
>
> —JERRY GARCIA

ONCE THE BAND GOT ROLLING, it became clear that Dana Morgan Jr. was too busy working at the music store to give his all to the Warlocks, and he was only a serviceable bass player to begin with. Something had to give.

Then, along came Phil Lesh.

PHIL LESH: I met Jerry when I worked briefly for KPFA. I was an engineer for *The Midnight Special.* I went to a party in Palo Alto, and Jerry was there singing and playing his guitar. I just had this flash— "This guy sounds really good; he makes the music live."

I asked if I could make a tape of him to play for Gert Chiarito, who was the host of *The Midnight Special.* He said OK, so we got in a car and went to Berkeley to get the tape recorder—this is when we had all the time in the universe—and he sang and played five or six songs. I played the tape for Gert

Garcia (left) and Lesh inside their charmingly decorated home at 710 Ashbury, where they lived from 1966 to '68.

and asked her if she thought he was good enough to play on *The Midnight Special.* She said this guy could have a show all to himself. They did an hour show of Garcia on KPFA, and after that, he was almost a regular.

PHIL LATER TOOK ACID WITH SOME FRIENDS AND went to see Garcia's new electric band, the Warlocks.

PHIL LESH: Good god, it sure was a great scene! We'd just been to see the Rolling Stones, and the Byrds had been in town—this was '65, their first gigs ever—and I just happened to mention it to Garcia—he was at the party, too; we were both stoned out of our minds. Weir came along with some grass, and we went to the car and got high, and I happened to mention sometime during that evening to Garcia, "I think I'll take up the electric bass and join a band." The next month, or the next whatever it was, we go down to hear the band, and Garcia takes me aside and puts a beer in my hand and says, "Listen, man, you're gonna play bass in my band." "But I . . . er . . . who, me? Well, Jesus, that might be possible." Actually, it excited the shit out of me, because it was something to do. And the flash was, "Oh, shit, you mean I can get paid for having fun?"

Of course, it was so ironic, because before, I'd gotten to the point where I just wanted to quit music entirely. I hated rock and roll music; I didn't think it was anything. I thought it was so lame. I said, "What can you do with three chords?"

JERRY GARCIA: [Phil] decided he wanted to do something that was happening right now; he didn't want to wait to hear his music performed. So in two weeks, he learned how to play the bass. The guy is really gifted. I showed him a few things—the sense of the bass—for each tune, and the rest he figured out for himself.

PHIL LESH: [I learned in] two weeks before the first gig, yeah. I didn't play too good, man; it was a real

wooden sound, real stiff. But we actually did play a gig two weeks afterwards. And for three or four years after that, when I would tell people how long I had been playing bass, they would say, "Amazing!"

JERRY GARCIA: We played in clubs, mostly, and bars—the Fireside, the In Room, [places] like that—for about three or four months, six nights a week, and that's where we really learned how to play. Five sets a night, you really get hot by the third or fourth set, and you can start playing some really insane stuff.

STEVE BROWN (GRATEFUL DEAD RECORDS EMPLOYEE): In '65, I left KSFO and went to work in record distribution, doing promotion: going to radio stations from south of San Francisco to Monterey, and also going to all the major record stores on the Peninsula and down to Santa Cruz and Monterey. So I would have this word coming to me from these stores about the bands they'd been seeing. And it inevitably came up "Warlocks, Warlocks." People would give you a heads-up on what's cool.

BOB MATTHEWS: I remember watching them in that first year, after Magoo's, doing the In Room for six weeks; doing the [San Francisco] Mime Troupe benefit. They were a dance band: People loved to dance to them, and they didn't like it when the song ended. And the band didn't like it, either, because they'd come up with a groove, and once you've got a groove, you go with it.

They started extending "Gloria" out to 15 minutes. I saw the evolution of improv: playing a tune longer than its formatted arrangement was. They would start to explore rhythmic variations. And as they'd start to do that, they'd start tripping themselves out.

BILL KREUTZMANN: We played extended pieces from the very beginning. We just never thought of stopping; it never crossed any of our minds to play three-minute songs. We played this bar called the In Room that was a terribly weird gig on some levels but a great learning gig for us—six nights a week, five sets a night. The weekends were all these heavy straight juicer types, and they'd be looking up at us as we played all these long, long songs, and they didn't know what to make of us. They wanted us to quit, but the men didn't want to admit they

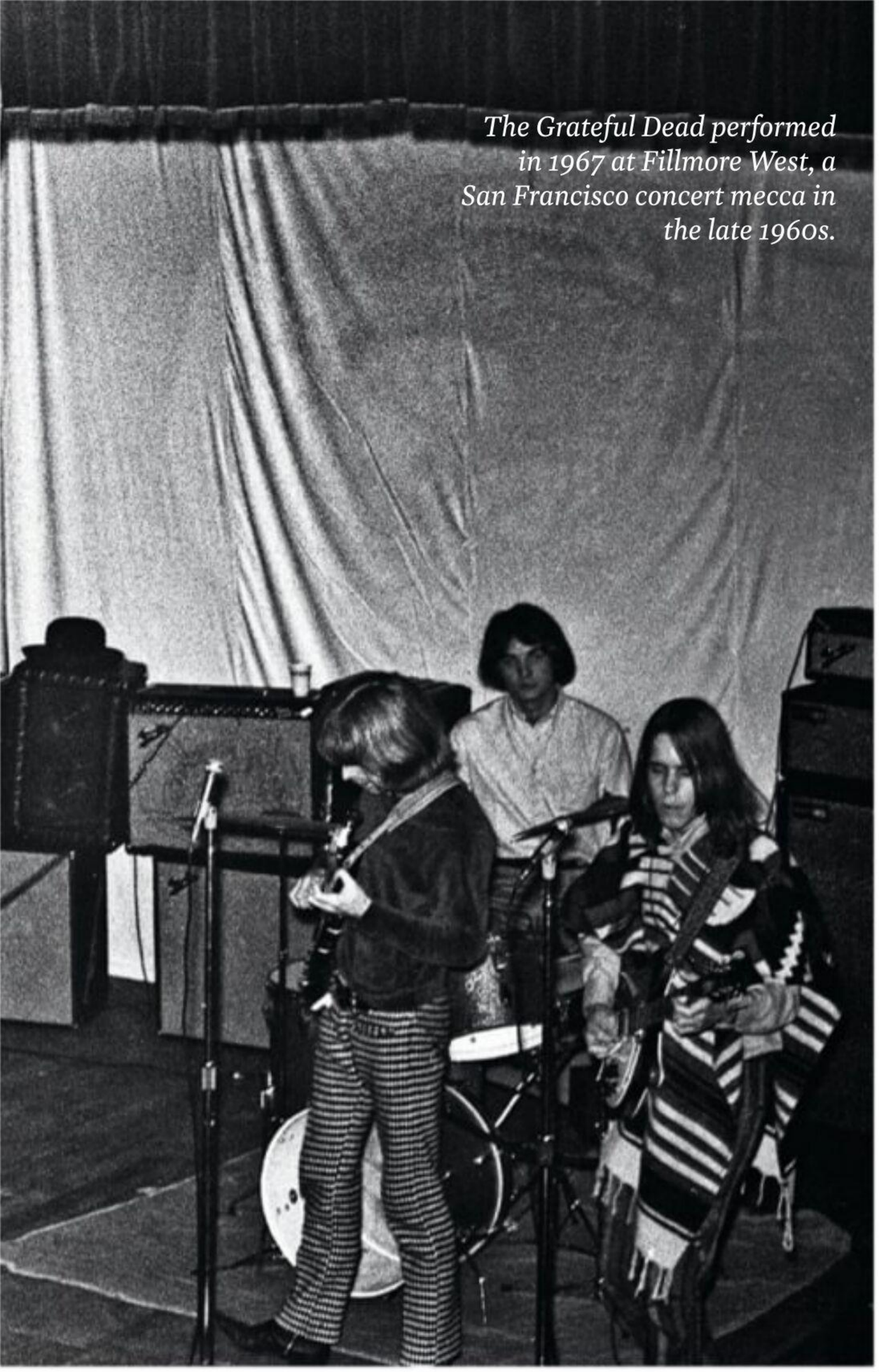
were tired of dancing and look shitty to their girls. We played every new Rolling Stones song that'd come out, and Pigpen would sing some blues. We just kept playin'.

JERRY GARCIA: We'd do songs, and suddenly they'd be 10 or 15 minutes long. Really, the phonograph record is the thing that says, "Hey, a song is three minutes long." Not music itself, certainly not for dancing.

Stuff like Ravi Shankar, Ornette Coleman, [John] Coltrane. I was listening to Ornette's *Free Jazz* record, and it was like, "Hey, new idea! That sounds like fun!"

A lot I got from Phil. I've heard him listen to stuff I thought sounded like shit, and he says, "Oh, it's great," then later I realize it is cool.

BILL KREUTZMANN: Phil was my big influence in jazz. During that rough first year after Phil and I



The Grateful Dead performed in 1967 at Fillmore West, a San Francisco concert mecca in the late 1960s.

joined the band and we were playing at Magoo's pizza parlor and joints like that, Phil lived near me in Palo Alto, and he turned me on to all sorts of stuff—not just jazz, but Charles Ives and people like that. It really turned my head around. Then, when we lived together in San Francisco, he turned me on to Coltrane, and I just bit on that. I thought, "Jeez, I gotta learn to play this stuff." I really listened to [Elvin Jones] a lot. He was a major influence, no question about it.

JERRY GARCIA: I first had the experience of having a player just exceed what you would normally expect [with] this bluegrass fiddle player named Scotty Stoneman, who was a real tragic case; he's dead now. He was a hopeless alcoholic when I heard him play, and was just about totally burned out, in fact, but he just played amazing. He'd take these medium-tempo fiddle tunes and stretch them out to about 15 minutes of completely free improvisation that wasn't bound in any way by the normal structure of the songs. It was just completely flowing over the top, like John Coltrane or anybody who plays in a stream of consciousness style of playing. It had amazing emotional content, but also with tremendous technical control at the same time, a beautiful combination of those two things, and for me that's always been a model for how powerful music can be. And it didn't have anything to do with loudness.

THE WARLOCKS, WHO WERE GETTING MORE AND more into acid themselves and increasingly enjoying the colorful psychedelic scene that was fast evolving in San Francisco, were looking for a new name. Apparently, "Warlocks" was already taken by some other band somewhere. When the group went to record their first demo tape at Golden State Studios on November 3, 1965, they called themselves the Emergency Crew. But that didn't cut it.

JERRY GARCIA: We were trying to think of a name for the band. Our name was originally the Warlocks. We discovered that there was a band back east or something like that recording under that name, and we decided, "Oh, no, we can't have that. We can't be confused with somebody else." So we were trying to think up names, and for about two or three weeks we went on the usual thing of coming up with thousands and thousands of very funny names, none of which we could use, like Skinny Minnie and the Vivisectionists. We were standing around in utter desperation at Phil's house in Palo Alto. There was a huge *Webster's New World Dictionary,* I believe—big monolithic thing—and I just opened it up, and there in huge black letters was "Grateful Dead."

It canceled my mind out, kind of, and I thought, "Well. . ." So we decided to have it, but it was funny, 'cause we really didn't like it too much at first, and it kinda made us shudder. We were worried that nobody was gonna go for it, it's too weird, and whatever. But finally, enough people called us that, and we called ourselves that enough times, that that's who we are now. ●

From This Is All a Dream We Dreamed: An Oral History of the Grateful Dead *by Blair Jackson and David Gans. Copyright © 2015 by the authors and reprinted by permission of Flatiron Books.*

San Francisco in the ’60s

The Dead forged their identity amid a Bay Area scene that was to hippie culture what Florence was to the Renaissance.

BY EILEEN DASPIN

From left: Phil Lesh, Rob "Pigpen" McKernan, Jerry Garcia, Bill Kreutzmann, and Bob Weir.

IT WAS A WHO'S WHO OF THE SAN FRANCISCO counterculture. For three nights in January 1966, some 10,000 weirdos, longhairs, rockers, folkies, and peaceniks gathered at Longshoremen's Hall to attend what was billed as the Trips Festival, a mind-blowing, multimedia experience. They'd come at the invitation of author Ken Kesey, the pied piper of psychedelia; Stewart Brand, the brains behind the *Whole Earth Catalog*; Roman Sender, cofounder of the San Francisco Tape Center, the city's' "it" avant-garde performance space; and a young concert promoter, Bill Graham. The Hell's Angels were on hand. So was the San Francisco Mime Troupe, a group of street theater actors, and many of Kesey's cohorts, called the Merry Pranksters. Kesey was present, too, but disguised in a space helmet to avoid the fuzz (he was facing jail time on pot charges). From his hiding spot, the author scrawled trippy phrases ("Anyone who knows he is God, go up on stage") that were projected on the walls at massive scale.

In the middle of the hall, on an insanely wired

Author Ken Kesey and members of the Merry Pranksters aboard their Day-Glo Bus in June 1964.

control tower, Prankster Ken Babbs coordinated multiple movie projectors, light machines, and exploding strobes. On the ground, around the perimeter, a troupe of young women in leotards danced and blew dog whistles. Attendees reveled. They also drank untold gallons of LSD-laced punch, which was distributed for free, and freely. (Hence the name—the Trips Festival.) Big Brother and the Holding Company was the musical entertainment one night. Jefferson Airplane took the stage on another. Many accounts describe the festival as the coming-out performance for the Grateful Dead, though Jerry Garcia later said he didn't remember playing, perhaps owing to the punch.

In his new-journalism classic, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,* Tom Wolfe noted that the Trips Festival was a turning point for hippiedom. "The heads were amazed at how big their own ranks had become," he wrote, "and euphoric over the fact that they could come out in the open, high as baboons, and the sky, and the law, wouldn't fall down on them." Wolfe's takeaway: "The Haight-Ashbury era began that weekend."

In the 1960s, New York City had smoky late-night basement bars and coffeehouses with Bob Dylan, Odetta, and Phil Ochs at the mic; jazz hangouts; and Andy Warhol's Factory, probably the most notorious art studio in history and the launching point for Lou Reed's influential Velvet Underground. There was St. Mark's Place and its head shops; Abbie Hoffman, cofounder of the Youth International Party (Yippies); and Jerry Rubin. Across the pond, Swinging London boasted headquarters for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Beatles, Mary Quant, and the UFO Club, with poetry readings and performances by Pink Floyd. But as the decade unfolded, there was no place on the planet that was groovier, more flower-power-y, more let-it-all-hang-out than the Grateful Dead's hometown.

San Francisco was the center of the free speech movement. It was a hub for anti–Vietnam War activity and an axis for the emerging New Left. San Francisco embraced the sexual revolution, psychedelics, and ecology; it rejected consumerism and the Man. The city was druggy. It was literary. It was

musical. It was where Lenny Bruce was first arrested for obscene speech and where Timothy Leary coined the phrase "Turn on, tune in, drop out."

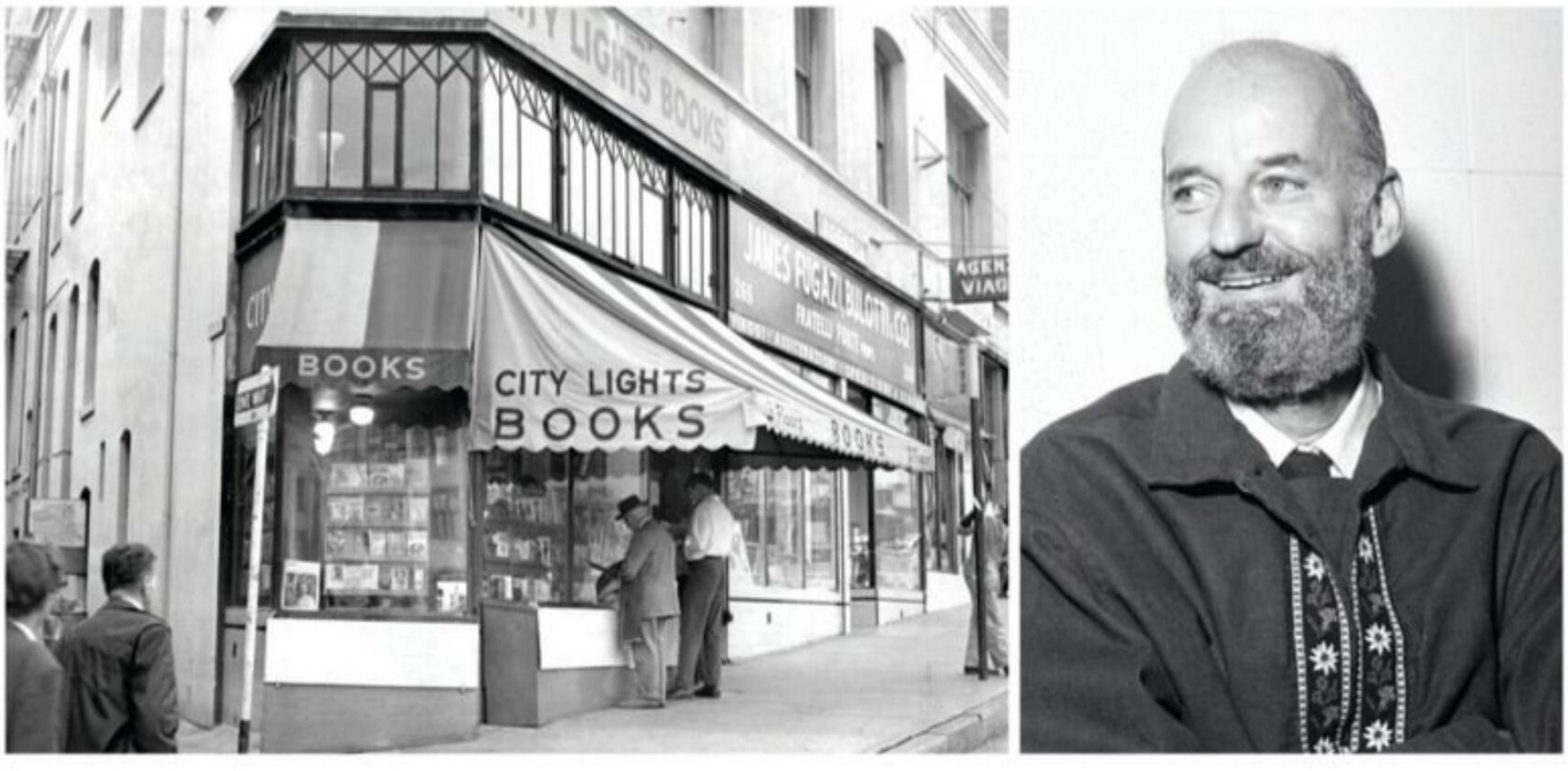
A gumbo of factors had conspired to make San Francisco what it was. The city had had a long history of tolerance—it had been a magnet for nonconformists since the Gold Rush era—and progressive politics. Geography and temperament were also contributors. Unlike New York, San Francisco was mellow, and unlike Los Angeles, it was intimate. Though there was San Francisco proper and then outlying locales such as Berkeley, La Honda, and Palo Alto, the towns coexisted as a single entity: the Bay Area.

Socially, artistically, and musically, the Bay was defined by cross-pollination. People just ran into each other. Dana Morgan's Music Store in Palo Alto was where Jerry Garcia met Bob Weir and Bill Kreutzmann. Perry Lane, a cluster of cottages in Menlo Park, was famous for its block parties and rotating cast of Pranksters. Show up for an omelet at Shandygaff, on the corner of Polk and Washington streets, and you might find Carlos Santana, Richard Brautigan, or Alex Haley. Binding the scene together was its music—folky, rock-y, jazzy, psychedelic, as much a rejection of convention as the Port Huron Statement, the student-activist manifesto that flipped a bird at the American status quo.

Not that San Francisco was the only place in the U.S. where the present was shedding the past. From East Coast to West, conforming was on its way out, speaking up on its way in. Americans were questioning fears instilled by the government about Communist influences in American life and of a nuclear attack. They were challenging the rationale that the world needed a hydrogen bomb to keep the peace and a space race to keep one step ahead of the Soviet Union. The Port Huron Statement was drawn up in 1962 by the SDS, the Students for a Democratic Society, in Port Huron, Michigan, at a United Auto Workers retreat. In Greensboro, North Carolina, Birmingham, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia, the civil rights movement was taking hold. Washington, D.C., was the site of the first large protest against nuclear proliferation, when some 1,100 Quakers, in a silent vigil, ringed the Pentagon for parts of two days. New York City hosted some of the first notable demonstrations against the Vietnam War, at the United Nations, in front of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, and in Times Square.

Yet it was San Francisco, with its frontier mentality and ingrained sense of social justice, that emerged as the counterculture's epicenter. The Bay Area had a communal philosophy that was about "being authentic, things seen as really important principles," filmmaker Alison Ellwood told the *Guardian* in a 2023 interview. Along with her filmmaking partner, Anoosh Tertzakian, Ellwood

City Lights Books, cofounded by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti (right), was a gathering place for the city's avant-garde.



codirected *San Francisco Sounds: A Place in Time,* a 2023 MGM+ docuseries about the Bay Area's music scene in the '60s and '70s. In the women's view, expressed in the episodes, the thrift store wardrobes, the folk and country influences in the bands' sonic makeup, and the reluctance to ink fat contracts were all of a piece with the city's core beliefs. "It was about being communal—communal living, communal values," said Tertzakian. "And that really defines that era in San Francisco."

AN AMERICAN BOHEMIA

The city's bohemian quarters have long been North Beach, an actual beach before the bayshore was built in the 1880s, today found about two miles from the Bay. During the Gold Rush, North Beach existed cheek by jowl with the Barbary Coast, the infamous red-light district, which teemed with brothels, speakeasies, and gambling houses.

The area—in essence San Francisco's Latin Quarter—came into being through a sort of happy accident. When land speculator Henry Wager Halleck put up the four-story Montgomery Block, the largest commercial building west of the Mississippi, he was hoping to make a fortune attracting lawyers and other professionals as tenants. But not long after construction finished in 1853, the financial center of the city moved to Market Street. Rents at Montgomery Block fell, and struggling artists and writers and activists moved in. In a warren of tiny rooms on the top three floors, multiple communities formed and grew, often in reaction to mainstream values. Among the personalities who took up quarters there were author, union man, and socialist Mark Twain. His fellow author and socialist Robert Louis Stevenson became a resident, as did George Sterling, the poet who later established an alternative community for like-minded progressives in Carmel-by-the-Sea. During the Depression, many WPA artists maintained their offices—where rents could be as low as $5—in the Montgomery Block, and it attracted visitors from artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo to anarchist Emma Goldman and influential photojournalist Dorothea Lange.

From almost the get-go, North Beach was also home to a large Italian immigrant population, many of them fishermen and dockworkers. Residents were poor and lived in apartments and tenements so tightly squeezed together that ladders sometimes took the place of stairs. As late as 1940, rents in the neighborhood averaged $35 a month, the lowest in San Francisco. Businesses that couldn't afford (or wouldn't be allowed) to open elsewhere began populating the area, including Finocchio's, a speakeasy that evolved into a female-impersonist club, and Mona's 440 Club, the city's first openly lesbian bar.

In the early 1950s, Peter D. Martin, son of the Italian radical Carlo Tresca (who was assassinated in New York City, perhaps by the Mafia), and poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti opened City Lights Books, the country's first paperback-only shop. The store and its avant-garde clientele would become central players in the San Francisco Renaissance and provide a home base to the antiestablishment Beats—figures including Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Neal Cassady—who emigrated to San Francisco from New York, hoping to escape hidebound East Coast culture.

City Lights also launched a publishing house and was instrumental in bringing the writing of the Beats to the American public. Among other books, City Lights in 1956 published Ginsberg's screeching 112-line poem, "Howl," which described drug use and homosexual activity and railed against materialism. When customs officials seized copies of the paperback shipped from a printer in England, Ferlinghetti was arrested for distributing obscene materials. The court case that followed turned into a national event, launched avant-garde writing, and paved the way for the American publication of the previously censored *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller and D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover.* Musicians, writers, and artists set off en masse for the Bay Area to see what the buzz was about.

Naturally, rents rose, and newcomers who wanted to follow in the Beats' footsteps had to look elsewhere. The neighborhood of choice: Haight-Ashbury, a run-down Victorian area where old homes were often subdivided into apartments and communal living arrangements were common. Among those who set down roots were members of the Grateful Dead, who moved into 710 Ashbury Street in 1965. Down the block at No. 635 was Janis Joplin; she was around the corner from 1524A Haight Street, home to Jimi Hendrix, who was walking distance from 2400 Fulton, the townhouse the Jefferson Airplane bought after the success of *Surrealistic Pillow.* Soon, the Haight itself was the destination, pulling in the Beats' successors, the hippies.

The Grateful Dead were the jam-loving, acid-dropping pied pipers of the Bay Area's burgeoning psychedelic music scene.

Businesses catering to the influx joined in. Peggy Caserta, a close friend of Janis Joplin, opened Mnasidika to sell peasant blouses, sandals, and jeans. Brothers Ron and Jay Thelin opened a trinket emporium called the Psychedelic Shop, today sometimes described as America's first head shop. By the Summer of Love in 1967, when some 100,000 young people showed up in San Francisco to check out the scene, crowds of hippies and hippie gawkers grew so large that the city rerouted two municipal bus lines on weekends and holidays. That was about the same time the Gray Line company introduced a hippie bus tour to replace the city buses. In a series about the neighborhood, the *San Francisco Examiner* described it as a "new paradise for beatniks… the outer fringe of the bohemian fringe."

Haight-Ashbury's transformation into hippie central was complete.

THE PSYCHEDELICS CAPITAL

Sidney Gottlieb is a name unfamiliar to most Americans, but anyone interested in the Bay Area's drug culture should know it. Gottlieb was a chemist, a genius, and, in a late-in-life career move, a speech pathologist. In the early 1950s, he was also the head of a CIA program called MK-Ultra, which, in response to the agency's fear that the communists had perfected a mind-control drug, set out to develop a truth serum to be used to undermine America's enemies abroad and domestically.

LSD had been around since the late 1930s, when it was invented by a Swiss chemist. By the late 1940s, the drug had seeped into psychiatry, where it was used to study serious mental-health disorders. Learning about the hallucinogen, Gottlieb arranged for the CIA to pay $240,000 to buy the world's entire supply and bring it to the U.S., where, through

a bogus foundation, he began to spread it around to hospitals, prisons, clinics, and other institutions, asking them to carry out research projects on LSD and see how people reacted to it.

In an "all-roads-lead-to-San Francisco" coincidence, one recipient of Gottlieb's largess was a VA Hospital in Menlo Park. The hospital began running a program where they asked volunteers to try LSD. Ken Kesey was living in the area, enrolled in a writing program at Stanford, heard about the experiments through a neighbor, and raised his hand for the $75-a-day gig. From his first trip, Kesey was overwhelmed with the sense of freedom. "We were beautiful," he said of his first LSD trip. "Naked and helpless and sensitive as a snake after skinning, but far more human than the shining nightmare that had stood creaking in previous parade rest. We were alive and life was us." Wanting to share the experience with friends, Kesey got a part-time job as a night attendant on the psych ward and began stealing samples for redistribution. The experience became fodder for his signature novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* set in a psychiatric hospital; Kesey came up with the idea for the character of Chief Broom, his narrator, while high on peyote.

Kesey and pals including Neal Cassady, Lee Quarnstrom, and Carolyn "Mountain Girl" Adams (she had a child with Kesey and would later marry Jerry Garcia and take his last name) became known as the Merry Pranksters. In their own version of the MK-Ultra experiments, the Pranksters began hosting happenings known as Acid Tests to spread the word and turn on America. The first semipublic Acid Test party was held November 27, 1965, at Prankster Ken Babbs' place in Soquel, promoted via handbills asking "Can You Pass the Acid Test?" that were distributed at the Hip Pocket Bookstore in Santa Cruz. About 50 people attended, were dosed with acid, and heard live music by a local bar band called the Warlocks (soon to be known as the Grateful Dead). More parties followed around California and, eventually, Oregon, Canada, and Mexico.

On a parallel track, marijuana use was catching on, and nowhere more so than in California and the Bay Area. As early as 1961, weed use in the state was escalating at such a rate that the legislature passed new laws putting virtually all pot-related offenses in the same felony class as heroin, murder, rape, and arson. By 1967, a lid (an ounce that could be turned into as many as 40 joints) could be had for $10 to

$15. San Francisco's public health director said the hard-core hippies in the city were costing $35,000 a month for substance abuse and warned that the impending Summer of Love could bring a danger of epidemics in infectious hepatitis (from needles exchanged in shooting up), not to mention venereal disease, cases of which multiplied sixfold. The same year, gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson, writing in the *New York Times,* dubbed the area the Haight-Ashbury. It's safe to say that spymaster Sidney Gottlieb and the CIA had made their mark.

THE SAN FRANCISCO SOUND

It was early summer 1966, and the woman's wails were so piercing, neighbors called the police to investigate. It sounded like the roof was about to blow off. But when the responding officers arrived, interrupting a Big Brother and Holding Company band rehearsal, they were reassured that nothing was amiss. The screamer was the group's new vocalist, recently arrived in San Francisco from Austin. Or, as the musicians explained, "Oh, that's just Janis [as in Joplin]. It's OK."

Informed by the blues, jug band music, folk, and Indian Raga, the 1960s San Francisco sound was as

Jefferson Airplane rocked the Smothers Brothers' TV show in 1968.
Opposite: McKernan with another local music hero, Janis Joplin.

hard to describe as air, Moby Grape and Jefferson Airplane manager Matthew Katz would say later. But one thing was for sure: The music was disruptive. Unlike the mellow tunes coming out of Laurel Canyon in Los Angeles, the Bay vibe was freaky, fueled by twangy electric guitar and LSD. It had a mystical, out-of-control quality. Instead of boy-meets-girl drama, the lyrics offered social and political narratives. Especially before the 1967 Monterey International Pop Festival that gave some of the bands wider exposure, local artists seemed uninterested in cozying up to record execs. They played for each other and with each other. Groups like the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother, Blue Cheer, and Sly and the Family Stone jammed loosely, oblivious to the idea of the radio-friendly three-minute track. "The L.A. artists were becoming singer-songwriters, hitmakers," filmmaker Ellwood told the *Examiner*. "The San Francisco crew was not only not about that, they were against it."

It's hard to pinpoint the exact beginning of the sound, but many credit the Red Dog Saloon, a bar and live-music venue in Virginia City, Nevada, about 250 miles northeast of San Francisco, where Big Brother, Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, the Charlatans, and the Grateful Dead booked their earliest gigs. The bands were recruited by DJ Chan Laughlin, famous for an all-night Native American peyote ceremony in 1963 where traditional folk and psychedelic rock, artists, and audiences all blended together. Performances at the Saloon replicated the Red Dog Experience in no small part because of the LSD supplied by Augustus Owsley Stanley III, a chemist and grandson of a U.S. senator from Kentucky, who also provided LSD to the Pranksters (and who later became a patron of the Dead, supporting the band until members could pay their own bills). Word about the Saloon made its way to San Francisco, and soon people were making the four-and-a-half-hour trip to catch the un-classifiable show. The Red Dog experiment ended after three years, but by then, the music scene in San Francisco had taken off, with the Grateful Dead front and center.

Slick in 1966, the year she left her band the Great Society to join Jefferson Airplane.

Grace Slick Remembers the Grateful Dead

The lead singer for Jefferson Airplane reflected on those early days when "it was this kinda pleasant free-for-all."

IF TWO PERSONALITIES EMERGED from the San Francisco scene larger than life, they were Jerry Garcia and Grace Slick. They traveled in the same circles; they were friends. She warmly recalled the time in a 2015 interview with LIFE Books.

"I came in a bit after the Warlocks," Grace says shortly before the sun rises in Southern California. These days, she is up predawn and enjoys the day—as best as she can. "As Bette Davis said, growing old's not for sissies. I've got diabetes. I've got this weird

thing where I can't fly because my feet swell up," she notes.

"So when I met them, they were already the Grateful Dead. At the time, you don't think, Oh this is gonna be noteworthy, I better remember this, it'll be important in 50 years. . . . You just are kind of hanging out. I was with a group called the Great Society when I met the Grateful Dead. I was not in Airplane yet. But all the bands, like the Charlatans, the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Janis, all those people—we all played the same venues. So we saw each other on a fairly regular basis in the early days.

"It was pretty much a community. The guys would play inter-band with each other, either at a folk house after [shows] or on the weekend or something. We all knew each other, and we would party together. The Dead had a ranch up in Northern California, and they would throw parties there. And there would be writers and musicians and, you know, local freaks like us.

"We would all shelter, for lack of a better word, 'shelter' each other, you know. You could stay at the Airplane house—I know people stayed there off and on for one reason or the other—stay there for a month or whatever, and the same thing went with the Dead ranch. I don't know which one of them owned the ranch. As I said, if I had known that I would be answering these kinds of questions 50 years later, I might have written it down so I'd know what I was talking about! But at the time, we were all just kind of hanging out and doing what we did, making music, taking drugs, screwing each other, having a good time, because there is nothing quite as wonderful as being in your 20s in the '60s. There was no AIDS. Anything you got, a sexually transmitted disease, could be cured. I know because I got them. I was in the hospital for four days once, a bunch of IVs and stuff, and then you get out and you're okay.

"There'd be writers and people [at the Dead ranch], and there'd be like a barbecue going on and people taking acid and wandering around. There was a swimming pool. You could go nude or you could wear a bathing suit if you wanted to, and it didn't matter. There were children running around. So it was this kinda pleasant free-for-all for what we called ourselves: 'freaks.' You know, because we were freaks compared to the straight nation.

"So, yeah, the barbecue. And we also went shooting guns. We didn't shoot animals, we shot at, you know, those wooden barriers that police put up? Sawhorse—that's what it was called. We'd shoot at those or shoot at a tree or something. But it was really stupid, because we're musicians—Quicksilver and the Grateful Dead and the Airplane—and we were deaf for about a week. So you know that's really stupid, when you're a musician, to deafen yourself.

"The record companies came and signed us. So we got paid basically to do what 20-year-olds like to do day to day: sex and drugs and travel. We got paid to travel. You know, wherever our manager would book us.

Rock promoter Bill Graham (right) spoke with Slick and Paul Kantner of Jefferson Airplane, with Jerry Garcia in the background.

"And we didn't have to change our clothes during the sets. They were lucky if we showed up. I mean, we didn't have to have funny outfits or exploding chickens or dancing boys or any of that kind of stuff. It was just, you show up, you play your music, and then you either go home or you go to another club—a club that's open. It was just very easy. Rock and roll is not a difficult medium. It was marvelous. All the people who say, 'Well, Janis was miserable and Garcia was miserable and Jim Morrison'—no, they weren't.

"But heroin is different from alcohol. Alcohol, unless you have a car accident, alcohol is usually a slow, stupid death. When you say, I think I'll have a little more heroin, a little more could kill you. But with alcohol, a little more just makes you a little drunker. And then over the years you're . . . well, you get fired from your job or your wife leaves and then your liver, and it's a slow, stupid death. Heroin is very sudden. And we were young and stupid in some ways, in a lot of ways. So you have just a little bit more, and. . . . You just have a little more, and it'll kill you." ●

How Grateful Dead Fans Became Deadheads

Examining the case of a band and an audience that were at their best when they were all together.

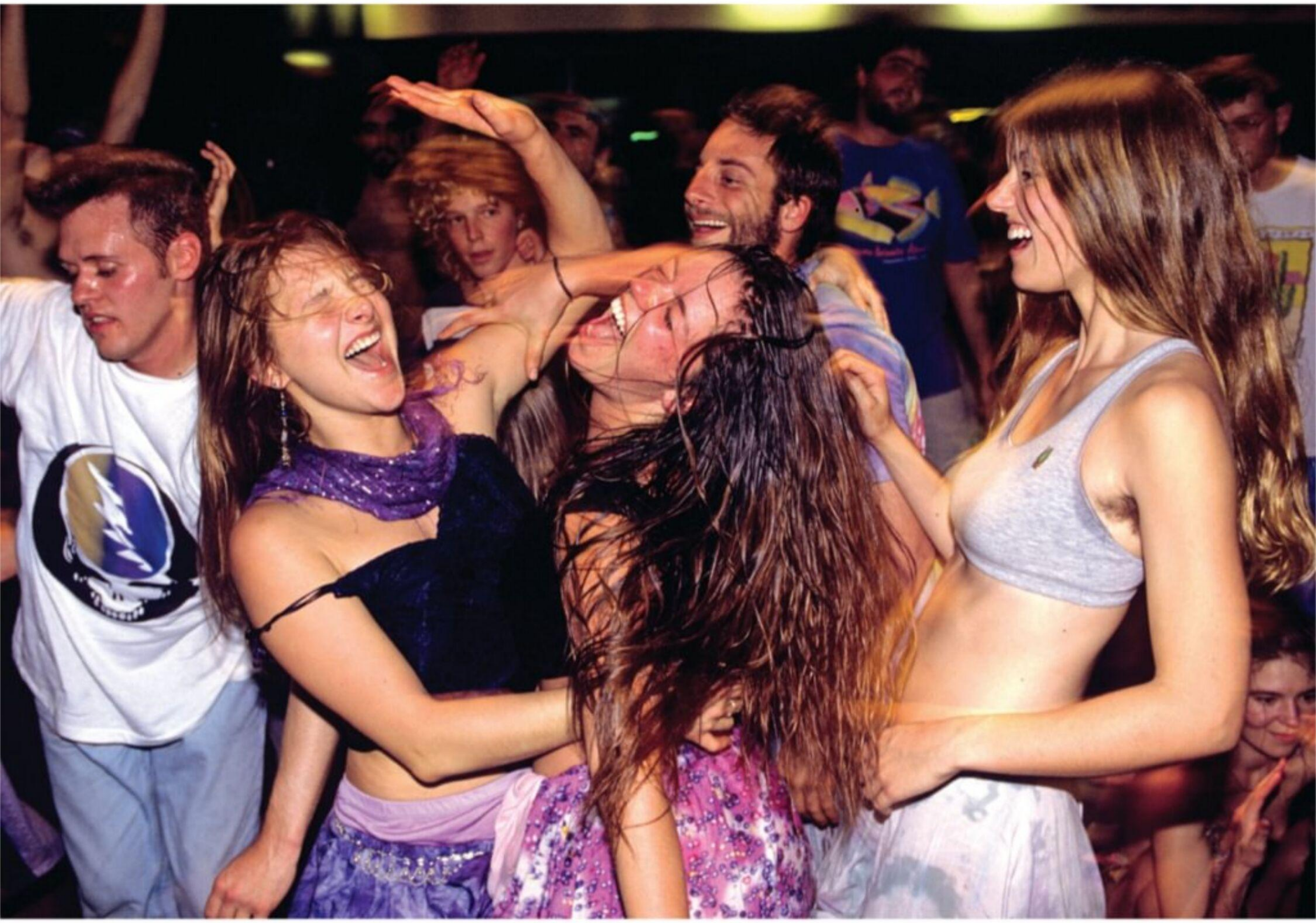
BY AMY LENNARD GOEHNER AND ARPITA ANEJA

These Deadheads enjoyed one another's company in Lewiston, Maine, in 1980.

WHAT DO AL GORE, WHOOPI GOLDberg, *Game of Thrones* author George R. R. Martin, Carlos Santana, Nancy Pelosi, Mario Batali, and, yes, Ann Coulter have in common? Give up? They're all members of the inimitable community of Grateful Dead fans commonly and affectionately known as Deadheads.

Urban Dictionary defines Deadhead as "a person who greatly enjoys the music of the Grateful Dead and particularly the genius of Jerry Garcia." Decades ago, a subset of fans cranked that devotion up to a whole new level and began following the band from city to city. This subset grew in number, soon giving birth to a community with its own set of rules and even its own slang.

Sure, Beatlemania once swept the U.S., where the demand to see the foursome live gave rise to stadium rock. And the Rolling Stones still have audiences under their thumb, despite their combined



age of 236. Fans of the band Phish (Phishheads) as well as Bruce Springsteen are formidable forces, but in terms of unbridled loyalty and devotion to the late Jerry Garcia and his bandmates, Deadheads are without peer.

Fans were not content to see the band just once. They were showing up to concerts over and over and over again—to see the band, but also one another. And the Dead took notice of the way their audience was becoming a community. As Jerry Garcia once said, "Our strong suit is what we do, and our audience." The Dead played a different song set at every show, sending "regulars" on the road to the next gig, since no two shows were ever the same. The Dead also not only allowed but actually encouraged fans to record the concerts, eventually setting up a "taper's section" for them. Hence, somewhere in the Deadosphere there exist tapes of practically all of the 2,300-plus shows the Dead performed in their 30 years of touring. If you have a lot of time to kill, ask a group of Deadheads to talk about their favorite live show.

The atmosphere at a performance reflected the sense of community and deep bond between the band and the audience. In an interview in the short film *A Conversation with Ken Kesey,* which followed the documentary *Tie-Died: Rock 'n' Roll's Most Deadicated Fans,* author Kesey commented on this phenomena: "[The Dead] weren't just playing what was on the music sheets, they were playing what was in the air. When the Dead are at their best, the vibrations that are stirred by the audience is the music that they play."

And if you couldn't get a ticket to the show, no problem—there was plenty of action outside. When the Dead were in town, the parking lot at their concert was transformed into a small village, with vendors selling tie-dyed shirts, burritos and, of course, drugs. Many of these vendors never attended a single concert, but they would camp out, hoping to earn

Fans shopped at a 2019 Dead & Company show at the Hollywood Bowl. Opposite: At the Grateful Dead's 1991 New Year's Eve show in Oakland.

enough money to pack up their painted Volkswagen bus and follow the band to their next stop.

Among the parking lot hordes, you could always spot the hopeful, roaming the grounds with a single raised finger: Deadhead code for "I Need a Miracle," a free concert ticket. Interestingly: That gesture was still in play in 2007 when newly elected House Speaker Nancy Pelosi threw a party and invited former members of the band to play. Outside stood a ponytailed, gray-suited gent holding a sign that read, "I Need a Miracle." A staffer on the inside recognized the clarion call and sneaked him in.

The parking lot scene was featured in the *Tie-Died* documentary and aptly described by one hippie couple in the film, who met at a show and had been following the band for three years with their child —conceived at that first show—in tow: "It's one big happy Dead kinda thing."

It was not always happy, though. As Jerry famously sang, "every silver lining's got a touch of grey"—more than a touch, actually. With the proliferation of drugs at Dead concerts, it was not uncommon to spot people who had overdosed. The Dead were the first rock band with a group of fans who formed a 12-step program to keep the lure of drugs at bay during concerts, where temptation is everywhere. These Wharf Rats—named after a Dead song—gathered under an arc of yellow balloons during set breaks, finding strength in numbers as they maintained sobriety "one show at a time."

Over the years, the fan base changed and evolved, but one thing remained constant. As Dennis McNally, longtime Dead publicist and author of the best-selling book *A Long Strange Trip,* wrote about Deadheads, "[They] had only one thing absolutely in common: Each had experienced some inner click of affinity, some overwhelming sense of 'here I belong,' when confronted by the Dead, [their] music and scene. It was the recognition of an essentially spiritual experience that bound them together."

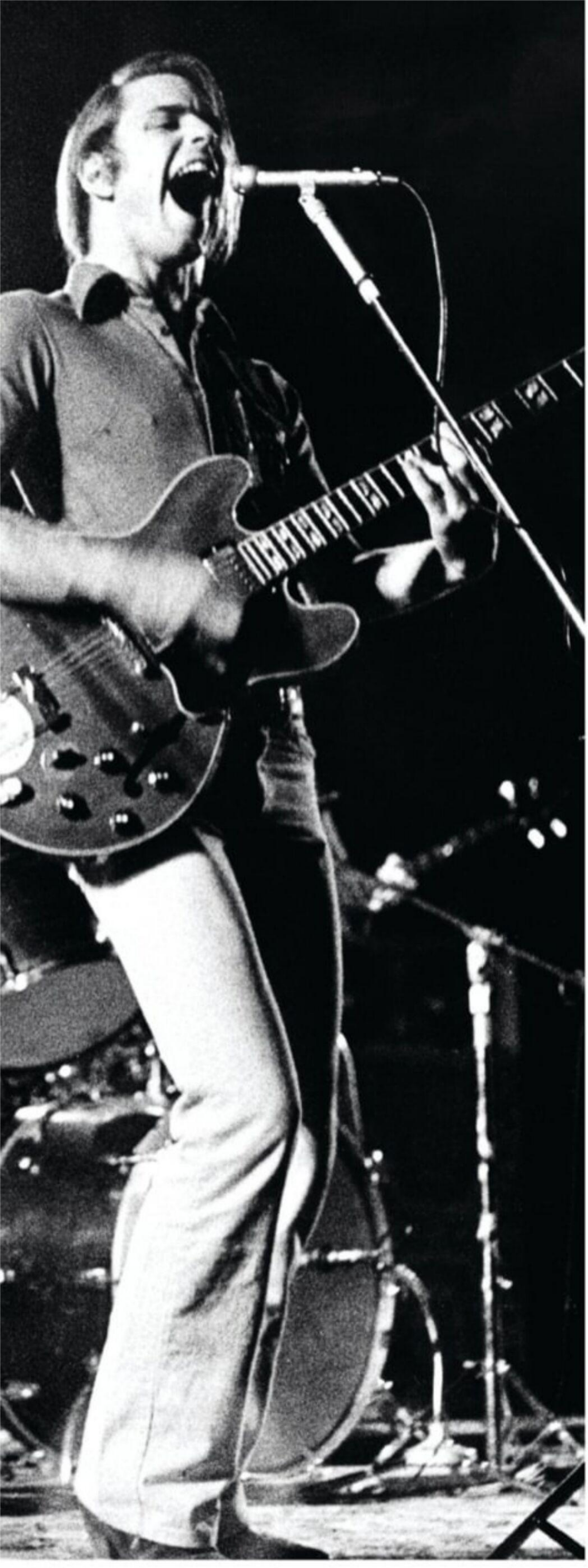
CHAPTER 3

Let There Be Songs

The Grateful Dead phenomenon was powered by live concerts that kept Deadheads coming back night after night, and also through radio staples that offered the casual fan a way in.

Jerry Garcia was a lead guitar player like no other.

At this show in Rotterdam during the Dead's 1972 tour of Europe, the band performed "Dark Star" for a record 48 minutes.



The Ultimate Live Band

The song "Dark Star" explains what made Grateful Dead concerts an experience like no other.

BY BILL SYKEN

In 1968, the Grateful Dead released a single called "Dark Star." The song was recorded during the sessions for their second studio effort, *Anthem of the Sun,* which would come out later that year. "Dark Star" was a compact two minutes and 50 seconds, but it didn't sound much like the kind of song you would hear on the radio. It was light on hooks, and the lyrics to its two short and simple verses were spare and mystic. The chorus ended with the line "Shall we go, you and I while we can/Through the transitive nightfall of diamonds?" That lyric was a trippy rewrite of the opening words of the T.S. Eliot poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

The single did not click with the Dead audience. It sold about 500 copies. "Dark Star" was not even included on *Anthem of the Sun* when the album was released later that year.

And if the story had ended there, the song would be an insignificant footnote. But it didn't. Fast-forward to the year 2004. The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame issues a list of the 500 essential songs that shaped rock music. Two songs from the Grateful Dead are included. One is the popular

hit "Uncle John's Band." The other is "Dark Star."

How was it that this song, virtually ignored upon its release, would be seen as so essential to the canon? To answer that question is to understand the Grateful Dead, who they are, and why they matter.

The "Dark Star" that the Hall list honored was not really the blip of a studio version. It was the song that became something else when the band performed it live. During the band's formative years, "Dark Star" was a sprawling canvas for the improvisation that defined the stage performances of the Grateful Dead.

While "Dark Star" was left off *Anthem of the Sun,* it did appear on *Live/Dead,* which came out in 1969 and was the first concert album issued by the band. The studio version of the song didn't make it to three minutes. But on *Live/Dead,* "Dark Star" went on for 23 minutes and 15 seconds. This was the version that gave people a taste of what went on at a Grateful Dead concert.

Keep in mind that this was the days of the physical album, so "Dark Star" took up an entire side of a vinyl disc. Picture yourself in 1969, the year of Woodstock, the moon landing, the Vietnam War and its attendant protests. You're putting this record on a turntable, knowing that when you drop the tonearm, you are in for a ride that will equal the running time of a sitcom, with its interwoven A, B, and C plotlines. How do you prepare yourself? Maybe you find a comfy spot on the sofa. Maybe you take a bong hit, or, if that's not for you, pop the tab on a can of cream soda. Then you listen. If you're waiting for Jerry to start singing, well, you better be patient, because it's more than six minutes of jamming before the first words come: "Dark star crashes, pouring its light into ashes…." Then comes a long improvisational section that leads into cascading guitar crescendos before returning to the second and final verse. If you've made it this far, if you've kept going, resisting the urge to just rip that

The band put on an epic five-hour show at the Sound Storm music festival in Wisconsin on April 26, 1970.

thing off the turntable and put on a Monkees record, there is absolutely no doubt what you are thinking as the cymbals echo and "Dark Star" reaches its conclusion.

You are thinking: *I've got to see this band live.*

AND THAT WAS THE REAL MESSAGE OF THE *Live/Dead* album, and of "Dark Star" in particular. It was a beacon, it was a siren, it was a bat signal. Come to a show. Drive five hours if you have to. Ditch your plans for the summer and follow the band around Europe. See what fresh magic the Grateful Dead will create.

Much of the great music of the late 1960s was about the brilliant creations of studio masterpieces—think of the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* (1966) and the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). They are two of the greatest rock albums ever made, pinnacles of the form. You could worship the bands that made those records without ever having to see them in concert. It would be great to have seen them, no doubt, but it also wasn't essential.

The Grateful Dead was the opposite of that, and they knew it, and they cultivated it brilliantly over the course of the band's existence. They changed their set list regularly. They actively encouraged fans to record shows. They fostered an atmosphere where the audience became something of a found family. And in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the band was engaging in what science-fiction writers call "universe building," the performances of "Dark Star" were an essential part of that experience.

Undoubtedly there are Deadheads who did not love "Dark Star," and upon hearing the opening notes they headed out for a bathroom break. But the song is important enough to the culture of the Grateful Dead that the band's wonderful official podcast, *Good Ol' Grateful Deadcast,* employs a "'Dark Star' correspondent," and a richly quali-

The lure of a set list that changed from night to night made every performance feel like a must-see for the most dedicated Deadheads.

fied one at that: Ohio State musicology professor Graeme Boone, who has made an extensive study of the song's many performances. If an episode of the podcast talks about a concert in which the song was played, Boone will come on to analyze that evening's rendition, both from a technical and philosophical perspective.

For example: In Rotterdam during the 1972 European tour, the band performed the longest "Dark Star" ever recorded, coming in at 48 minutes. Boone, while guiding podcast listeners through the jam, talked about the intricate interplay taking place among band members Jerry Garcia, Phil Lesh, Bob Weir, and Bill Kreutzmann, getting into the technical musical aspects of what each band member was doing, and also adding, "This is a wonderful moment where the band members have to know how to not listen to each other as well as listen to create this fantastic polyphony." Yes, of course. And as Boone's analysis continued, he explained one reason this version lasted so long: Midway through, Garcia stopped to tune his E string. In most concerts, a mid-jam tuning might be an annoying disappointment, but *Deadcast* host Jesse Jarnow chimed in with this take on what Jerry was doing: "It's a good life lesson. Even when you're out there, and I mean out there, it's still good to stop and tune, even if it means risking forking the timeline and falling through a wormhole."

This talk of "falling through a wormhole" and "listening without listening" is a reminder of the importance of psychedelic drugs to the Grateful Dead culture. But what's happening here is a little deeper than that.

Because these Dead shows were more than just a good time. They were a place where people did have profound life experiences. Consider this anecdote from Bill Weber, who in October 1972 was a student at the University of Kansas and drove all the way across Missouri to catch the band as they played three shows at the Fox Theatre in St. Louis. He remembers those shows as a before-and-after moment in his life. At those shows, he realized a fundamental truth about himself: He was gay, and he had to stop fighting it.

"And that is a direct result of having experienced

those three shows: the liberation, the freedom, the expansion, the acceptance," Weber recounted on a different episode of the *Deadcast*, one devoted to those Fox shows. "So much of what the Dead's music is about for me is coming to grips with the way things are. And sometimes that's painful, and sometimes it's joyous. You get there, and there's a redemption in it. I've known of no other rock band that offers redemption like the Grateful Dead."

TRUTH AND IMPROVISATION ARE CONnected ideas, and improvisation is the defining element of "Dark Star." The song really opens up in the space between its two verses, with the band filling that gap in a different way each night. On occasion they would even fill it by performing an entire other song, and then coming back to "Dark Star." They really were making it up as they went along.

Improvised art was not invented in the latter half of the 20th century, but that is when the practice flourished. Think of the image of Beat novelist Jack Kerouac typing 100 words a minute onto a long scroll of paper, driven by the idea that if he let the words flow uninterrupted, they would find some essential truth. Or Jackson Pollock splattering paint on the canvas. Or the improvisational comedy scene that took root in Chicago around that time and shaped our great modern laugh factory, *Saturday Night Live*. And first and foremost, think of the world of jazz, where improvisation really began to take off in the 1940s and was an essential and underrated influence on the Grateful Dead, especially in songs such as "Dark Star." The appeal of improv is the idea that if you just let it rip, if you express yourself spontaneously, some essential truth will come out. And if people improvise in a group setting, such as among band members, the give and take serves as a beautiful example of people communing with one another.

The drug aspect of the Dead experience was part of that quest. Rightly or wrongly, the psychedelics were seen as an avenue to truth—the ancient wisdom of *in vino veritas* taken to a new level, right through the transitive nightfall of diamonds.

IT HAS BEEN ESTIMATED THAT THE GRATEFUL Dead performed "Dark Star" in concert about 250 times, with the heaviest concentration coming in the 1960s and early '70s. But following the band's break from touring in 1975, "Dark Star" began to fade from set lists, with songs such as "Playing in the Band," "Scarlet Begonias," "Fire on the Mountain," and many others becoming the springboards for extended jams. A fan outside the band's show at the closing of Winterland in San Francisco in 1978 held a sign that read 1535 DAYS SINCE LAST S.F. DARK STAR. In the 1980s, the band, though touring regularly, played "Dark Star" only six times: at a New Year's Eve show in Oakland in 1981, in Berkeley in the summer of 1984, and then in four performances in the fall and winter of 1989, including another New Year's Eve show in Oakland, though it did come back more in the 1990s. But it continued to hold a singular place in the band's mythology. Phil Lesh has an oft-repeated quote: "'Dark Star' is always playing somewhere. All we do is tap into it."

> On *Live/Dead*, "Dark Star" went on for 23 minutes and 15 seconds. This is the version that gave people a taste of what it was like to be at a Grateful Dead concert.

Jerry Garcia made a comment in a similar vein during an interview with Yale law professor Charles Reich for the 1972 book *Garcia: A Signpost to New Space* (credited to Garcia, Reich and Jann Wenner, the founder of *Rolling Stone* magazine). Reich was trying to ask about "Dark Star," and Garcia said it was hard to talk about it as if it were a regular song because each performance of it was really its own thing—it was less a song than an experience that is continually changing.

"'Dark Star' has meant, while I'm playing it, almost as many things as I can sit here and imagine," he said. Reich pressed on, saying, "Yeah, well, talk about it a little," to which Garcia answered, "I can't. It talks about itself."

Garcia at that moment was every Deadhead at some point in their life, trying to explain to someone a phenomenon that they understand is not explainable. You just have to experience it for yourself.

The Peak Concert Experience

Taking on the impossible task of choosing his top Dead shows, one writer zeroed in on a stretch of the early 1970s when it was all coming together.

BY MICHAEL SCHERER

YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO TRUST ME on this, kids.

Once upon a time, rock and roll was exciting. Not Mumford and Sons-tries-to-sound-like-Coldplay exciting. Not new-U2-tries-to-sound-like-old-U2 exciting. Not some-Swedish-producer-found-a-way-to-get-better-sonics-from-an-acoustic-strum exciting. But really, shockingly, I have-no-idea-what-happens-next, can-you-really-do-that-with-an-electric-guitar exciting. Buddy Holly exciting. Velvet Underground exciting. Grateful Dead exciting. Exciting like a new Beyoncé track is today.

Those days are gone. Holly is history. Lou Reed has also passed to the wild side. And the Dead have been dead for years, even though the surviving members continue to perform under the banner of an act that ended, depending on your point of view, when Jerry Garcia died in 1995 or at some point before, when he fell into his heroin addiction, or relapsed back into it, over a blur of tours, triumphs, and burnouts during the preceding two decades.

But the Grateful Dead at their peak is truly a phenomenon worth remembering, and celebrating, and rediscovering. The band—who played together for the first time on May 5, 1965, under the name the Warlocks—developed a strand of rock that will never be matched, because the ground cannot be broken again.

By grafting the discipline of backwoods American roots music to the improvisation of Charlie Parker, Art Tatum, and Django Reinhardt, they tied together two great eras of 20th-century American white-kid rebellion—the Beats and the hippies—and then took it as far as their minds could stretch, with the early help of wide-eyed, West Coast LSD.

This was a band that suffered writing songs and struggled in the studio but shot the moon on the stage. On any given night, they could be terrible or terrific or both, and no single member of the band controlled the outcome. For at its core, this was an improv band, with each member of the group playing around his part in each song, stretching for something he had not achieved before. For years, they went on stage without set lists. For decades, they surprised even themselves.

So as a service to those who will never see a show, and who may now mistake the Grateful Dead for a parking lot scene of dreadlocked dullards huffing nitrous balloons and seeking other chemical escapes from suburban malaise, here are a few of their better shows over the years—which are now archived online and available to stream for free.

The Grateful Dead performed during their two-night stand for the ages at RFK Stadium in June 1973.

AUGUST 27, 1972, THE OLDE RENAISSANCE FAIRE GROUNDS IN VENETA, OREGON
This was benefit concert for a yogurt farm owned by relatives of author and Merry Prankster Ken Kesey. The show was recorded for a live album and also the film that became *Sunshine Daydream,* released in 2013.

JUNE 9, 1973, ROBERT F. KENNEDY STADIUM IN WASHINGTON, D.C.
The Allman Brothers were also on the bill for both parts of this memorable two-night extravaganza in the nation's capital. The show's many big jams included a 22-minute-plus rendition of "Playing in the Band."

JUNE 10, 1973, ROBERT F. KENNEDY STADIUM IN WASHINGTON D.C.
This show was released as a four-disc live album, with Dickey Betts and Butch Trucks of the Allman Brothers joining the Dead for the closing set. The band does "Dark Star" on this night, which they hadn't the night before.

AUGUST 13, 1975, THE GREAT AMERICAN MUSIC HALL IN SAN FRANCISCO
The Dead played only four shows that year, and this one, in front of a crowd of less than a thousand people, was released as a live album. The exploratory set finishes with a 21-minute version of "Blues for Allah."

The Making of a Masterpiece

In the studio, the Grateful Dead crafted radio classics aplenty. But none is more enduring than "Friend of the Devil."

BY BILL SYKEN

ROBERT HUNTER WROTE THE SONG "Friend of the Devil" in 1969, when he was living with Jerry Garcia in Larkspur, California, and trying to cook up material for another band he and Jerry were in together, New Riders of the Purple Sage. Hunter's early draft had much in common with the version fans have come to know in concert and through extensive radio play: The song was a sort of Americana folk tale about a scoundrel living on the edge of the law, enjoying the sinner's life while simultaneously paying a price for his choices.

What was different about Hunter's early drafts was that it did not actually include the phrase "friend of the devil." Hunter had initially rhymed the lyric "Set out runnin' but I take my time" with "It looks like water but it tastes like wine."

That changed when Hunter played the song for NRPS members David Nelson and John Dawson while they were making espresso in the kitchen of their house a few miles away in Kentfield. As recounted by Hunter in his journal, Dawson said he liked the song but found the line about water and wine a little flat. Hunter acknowledged there was room for improvement, which came in a flash: "Suddenly Dawson's eyes lit up and he crowed, 'How about "A friend of the devil is a friend of

Jerry Garcia and Phil Lesh at a 1967 recording session in Los Angeles.

mine?"' Bingo, not only the right line but a memorable title as well!"

Hunter and the NRPS members who were there that day—Jerry was absent—quickly recorded a version of the song with the new lyric, and when Hunter returned home, he left the tape on the kitchen table. The next morning, Hunter woke up to find that Garcia had not only discovered the tape and listened to it but was playing the song and putting his own spin on it, converting Hunter's verse about the two reasons he cries away each lonely night into a bridge. Said Hunter, "He was not in the least apologetic about it. He'd played the tape, liked it, and faster than you can say 'dog my cats,' it was in the Grateful Dead repertoire."

And what an addition it turned out to be.

The Grateful Dead recorded the song for their album *American Beauty,* which came out in November 1970. That release arrived five months after another album, *Workingman's Dead,* and both records constituted a move from their early bluesy records toward a California country sound.

Workingman's Dead had included the songs "Uncle John's Band" and "Casey Jones." *American Beauty,* in addition to "Friend of the Devil," delivered "Sugar Magnolia," Truckin,'" "Box of Rain," and "Ripple." The Grateful Dead had 13 studio albums, but if you hear the band on the radio, there's an excellent chance the song is from one of these two records. It must be noted that the studio recordings are not, in essence, what the band was about. The group is defined by its live performances, the people who gathered at those concerts, and the experiences they shared. The studio albums are ultimately of less interest than the recordings made at the Fox Theatre in St. Louis, Cornell University's Barton Hall, and hundreds of other venues around the country and across the globe. If the Grateful Dead had given concerts that were nothing but faithful performances of predictable set lists, they would still be a respected band and likely Rock & Roll Hall of Famers, but they would not be seen as essential and distinctive titans of modern musical culture.

That said, they did record some outstanding music in the studio, and "Friend of the Devil" is, by several measures, a prime example. Dead experts have proclaimed it the most covered song in the band's pantheon. Among the many artists who have taken a run at it, either in the studio or on stage, are Tom Petty, Mumford & Sons, Lyle Lovett, and Elvis Costello. The recommendation here is for a version by the Counting Crows, with Adam Duritz's achy vocals making palpable that desire to get home before daylight. Among its interpreters is Robert Hunter himself, who performed a version that brings back a couple of his lines that the Dead chose to omit: "You can borrow from the devil, you can borrow from a friend/But the devil will give you twenty, when your friend got only ten."

But the original studio version of "Friend of the Devil" has plenty of fans. It is the Grateful Dead's most streamed song on Spotify, with nearly 110 million listens. And part of the reason why the song is so frequently streamed is that it has a reach that goes beyond core Deadheads. There are many, many people who have never been to a show and would never wear a tie-dyed T-shirt but still know all about the wife in Chino and the one in Cherokee. They know because they've heard this song more times than they can count on the classic-rock airwaves, wedged in between songs such as the Eagles' "Hotel California" and the Allman Brothers' "Ramblin' Man." They make for a snug fit: On a dark desert highway,

Lyricist Robert Hunter lent his poetic touch to "Friend of the Devil" and many other Dead classics. Opposite: Bob Weir and Phil Lesh in the studio in 1979.

trailed by twenty hounds, rolling down highway 41.

What are the qualities that make "Friend of the Devil" a popular staple for an iconoclastic band? From a lyrical perspective, the song, like the band itself, melds classic elements of Americana into something distinctive. The blues master Robert Johnson recorded his signature song, "Hellhound on My Trail," in 1937, and the protagonist of "Friend of the Devil" opens the song being trailed by twenty hounds. But the settings—Utah, Reno, the hills—give it the feel of a cowboy song, too. Also critical to the Dead vibe is the word "friend." Imagine if Hunter had written about a minion of the devil. Suddenly it's a heavy metal song. When you place it in the societal context of the hippie movement and the protests of the day, and this figure living on the edge of the law and of subsistence takes on a counterculture spirit, too.

From a musical perspective, this is a song that moves right along, with the mandolin element by guest musician David Grisman giving it a distinctive bounce. The song sets out running, but it doesn't take its time at all. In concerts, the Dead would slow the song down greatly, with some versions lasting longer than eight minutes. But the studio version clocks in at three minutes and 24 seconds—it's a radio programmer's dream.

And that is a virtue when viewed from the perspective of growing a community. Think of the world of the Grateful Dead as an isolated bar on the outskirts of town. The bar might look ordinary from the outside; it's only when you go inside that you discover it's a magnificent world of ever-expanding space. How do you get people to give it a try? You hope for word of mouth, but you also hang some neon lights in the windows, letting potential visitors know that you're open and serving their favorite libation, and there's dancing if you're in the mood. For the Grateful Dead, the neon signs are "Casey Jones" and "Truckin'" and "Box of Rain," and, in big, glowing red letters, "Friend of the Devil." They are the songs that extend an invitation and say, "Come on in. This is a place where people have a good time."

The Studio Album Guide

The Dead oeuvre includes undisputed classics, fascinating experiments, and a few notable misfires.

BY BILL SYKEN

THE GRATEFUL DEAD MADE 13 STUDIO ALBUMS, AND THEY ARE A DOCUMENT of these road warriors trying to make great music in a more sterile setting. Sometimes they succeeded, crafting classic rock staples and on occasion delivering performances that captured the spirit of the stage. And when the albums didn't live up to their standards, the band was ready to admit it.

1. *THE GRATEFUL DEAD* (1967)

The track to listen to on their debut is "Viola Lee Blues"; Phil Lesh said in his autobiography that the rollicking jam was the only song on this record that captured what the band actually sounded like at the time. The album opener "The Golden Road (to Unlimited Devotion)" is a good time. Ron "Pigpen" McKernan does a cover of the 1937 Sonny Boy Williamson song "Good Morning Little School Girl" that has not aged well.

2. *ANTHEM OF THE SUN* (1968)

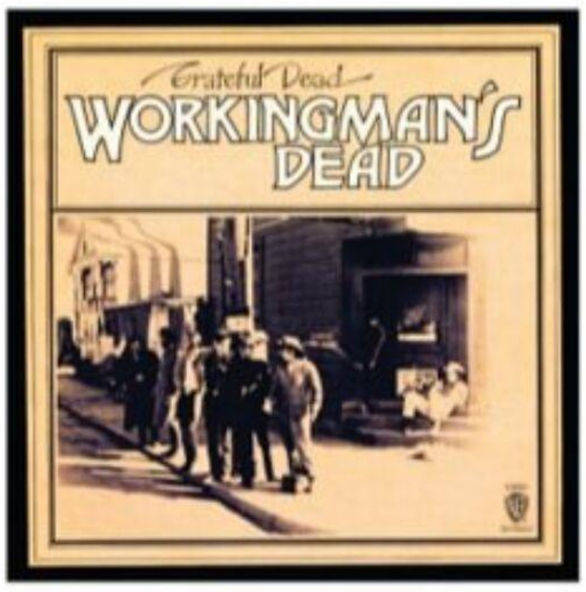
The band deployed an innovative process that melded studio recordings and live performances to create the final songs. Upon its release, *Rolling Stone* called the album's first side "a masterpiece of rock," and the 8:18-minute rockout "New Potato Caboose" captured the band's distinctive energy. There are only five songs, most of them quite long, with the only exception being "Born Cross-Eyed," which had been previously released as the B-side to the single "Dark Star." In 1972, the label issued a remixed version of the album as the band heated up commercially.

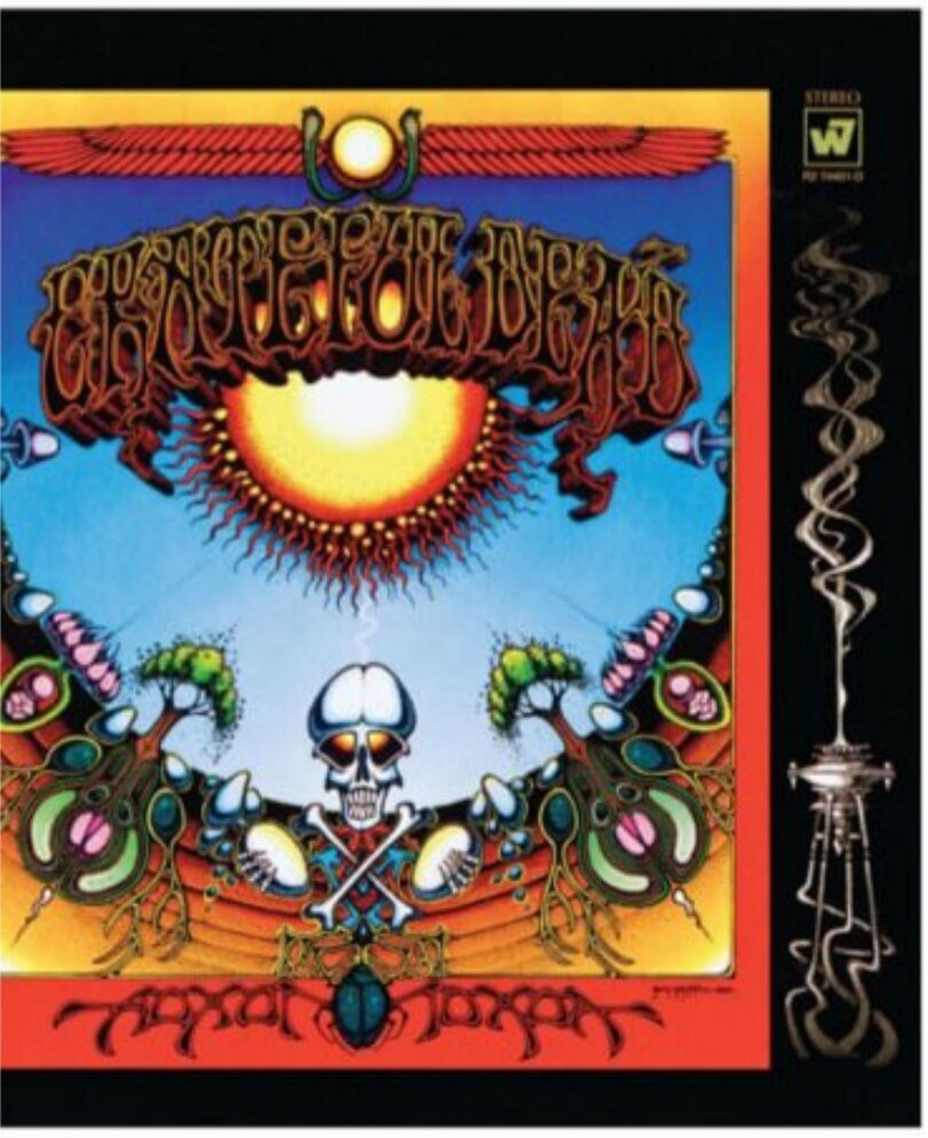
3. *AOXOMOXOA* (1969)

The title is an unpronounceable palindrome, and the album yielded the songs "St. Stephen" and "China Cat Sunflower," both early collaborations between Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter. This was the first record on which Hunter was recognized as a band member. It was also the first album recorded in the Bay Area, the only one to list pianist Tom Constanten as an official member, and the first record done in 16-track rather than 8-track recording—for better or worse. Bill Kreutzmann wrote of the recording process, "The end result was dense and cumbersome in places, and all that studio time cost us a fortune, but we were experimenting on the sonic frontier, exploiting cutting-edge technology."

4. *WORKINGMAN'S DEAD* (1970)

The title is a nod to Merle Haggard's 1969 song "Workin' Man Blues," and the record showed the influence of his brand of California country. The album opens with one classic, "Uncle John's Band," and closes with another, "Casey Jones." Also of note is "New Speedway Boogie," the rare topical Dead song, which was written in response to the 1969 concert at California's Altamont Speedway during which a concertgoer was stabbed and killed by Hells Angels security. The Dead were slated to perform but canceled their set following the tragedy.





5. *AMERICAN BEAUTY* (1970)

Five months after *Workingman's Dead,* the turn toward Americana was solidified and the songwriting partnership between Garcia and Hunter was in top form. This record is chock full of classics—"Friend of the Devil," "Box of Rain," "Sugar Magnolia," "Ripple," "Truckin'." In 2020, Pitchfork reviewed a 50th anniversary edition of *American Beauty* and gave it a rare perfect 10 rating, calling it the Dead's greatest studio album.

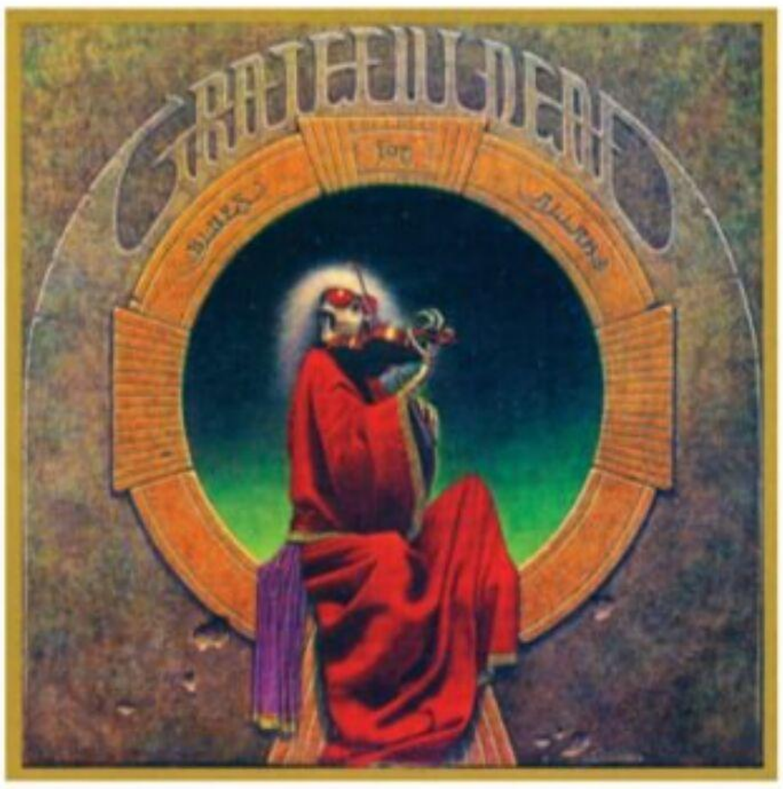
6. *WAKE OF THE FLOOD* (1973)

The Dead issued three live albums in between *American Beauty* and *Wake of the Flood,* the band's first release on its own Grateful Dead record label. This was the first venture into the studio without Ron "Pigpen" McKernan, who had died in March of that year, and also the first with new members Keith Godchaux and Donna Jean Godchaux. Keith and Robert Hunter cowrote "Let Me Sing Your Blues Away," which was the album's first single (with "Here Comes Sunshine" as its B-side).

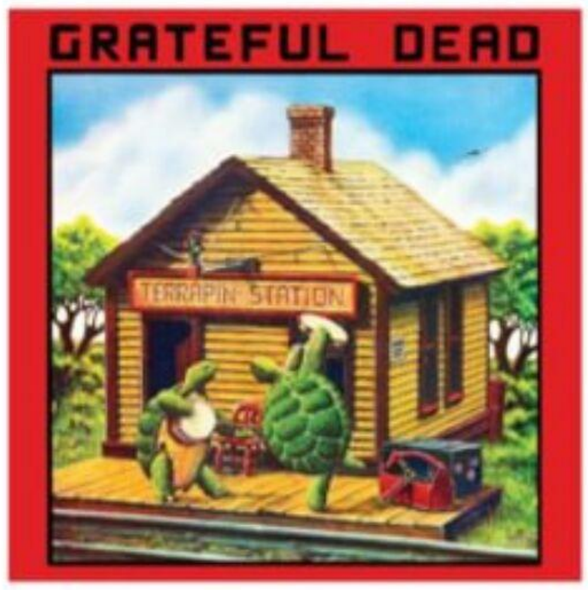
7. *FROM THE MARS HOTEL* (1974)

The building on the cover is an actual San Francisco flophouse. The band initially planned to call the record *Ugly Roomers* and then *Ugly Rumors,* and the alternate title still earned a place on the album cover. The record opens with the hit "U.S. Blues," an anthem for the Watergate era, and it also includes the groovy "Scarlet Begonias" and the majestic "Ship of Fools." This is the only Dead record on which Phil Lesh sings two songs: "Pride of Cucamonga" and "Unbroken Chain."

8. *BLUES FOR ALLAH* (1975)

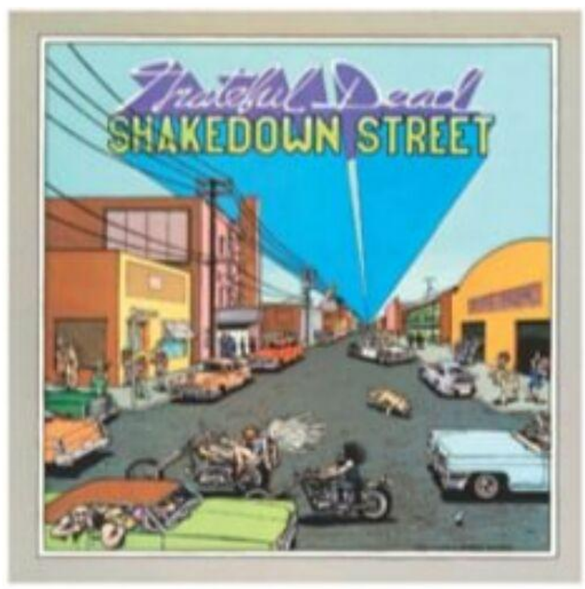


The breakout song from this record is the rollicking "Franklin's Tower," but overall, the album is notable for the inclusion of five instrumentals among its 11 tracks, as the band sought to bring more of a live feel to their recordings and get their groove on in the studio. Said Kreutzmann, "Those songs are among our very best, and they lived up to their potential. We had to play them live in front of an audience in order for that to happen."



9. *TERRAPIN STATION* (1977)

With the dissolution of Grateful Dead Records, the band signed with major label Arista, and the partnership got off to an uneasy start. This album's title track, a 16-minute medley, would be criticized by Jerry Garcia and Phil Lesh, who didn't like the way veteran producer Keith Olsen prettified it with strings and a choir. The first single was a cover of the Martha and the Vandellas song "Dancing in the Street," which the band had been performing in concert for years.



10. *SHAKEDOWN STREET* (1978)

The massively popular *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack came out in November 1977, and it's hard not to hear its influence in the opening notes of the title track. Most songs on this record, coproduced by Lowell George of Little Feat, didn't suggest a Bee Gees influence, but enough did to inspire the coining of the term "Disco Dead." This record would be the last for the Godchaux before they left the band.

11. *GO TO HEAVEN* (1980)

This record starts with "Alabama Getaway," a track in the classical Dead mode, and "Althea" digs a nice mid-tempo groove. New keyboardist Brett Mydland sings on two tracks, and his vocals bring a distinctive classic soul element. The record is not particularly beloved, and its cover is perhaps the band's oddest. In those white suits, the guys look like they're going either to heaven or a bottle-service club in Miami.

12. *IN THE DARK* (1987)

The band's first studio album in seven years was a momentous one. The single "Touch of Grey" spawned the Dead's first MTV music video, in which the song was performed by animatronic skeletons. The band members did appear, though, in videos for "Hell in a Bucket" and "Throwing Stones." Suddenly the Grateful Dead was in rotation with Madonna and Bon Jovi, and they were being discovered by a new generation of fans. The album went double-platinum, "Touch of Grey" became the band's only top-10 single, and concert attendance swelled.

13. *BUILT TO LAST* (1989)

Band members described this final effort as having been rushed to meet a deadline for Arista. It yielded only one single, the middling "Foolish Heart." While *Built to Last* was the Grateful Dead's last official studio album, the band had been readying to return to the studio for another effort, built around songs that were already being played in concerts, when Jerry Garcia died in 1995. Those songs were collected on 2019's *Ready or Not,* using live versions from 1992 through 1995. The best track is a 13:26 version of "Days Between" recorded at the Oakland–Alameda County Coliseum. Listening to it, you may long for a world in which the Dead used this method for all their albums and never went into the studio at all. ●

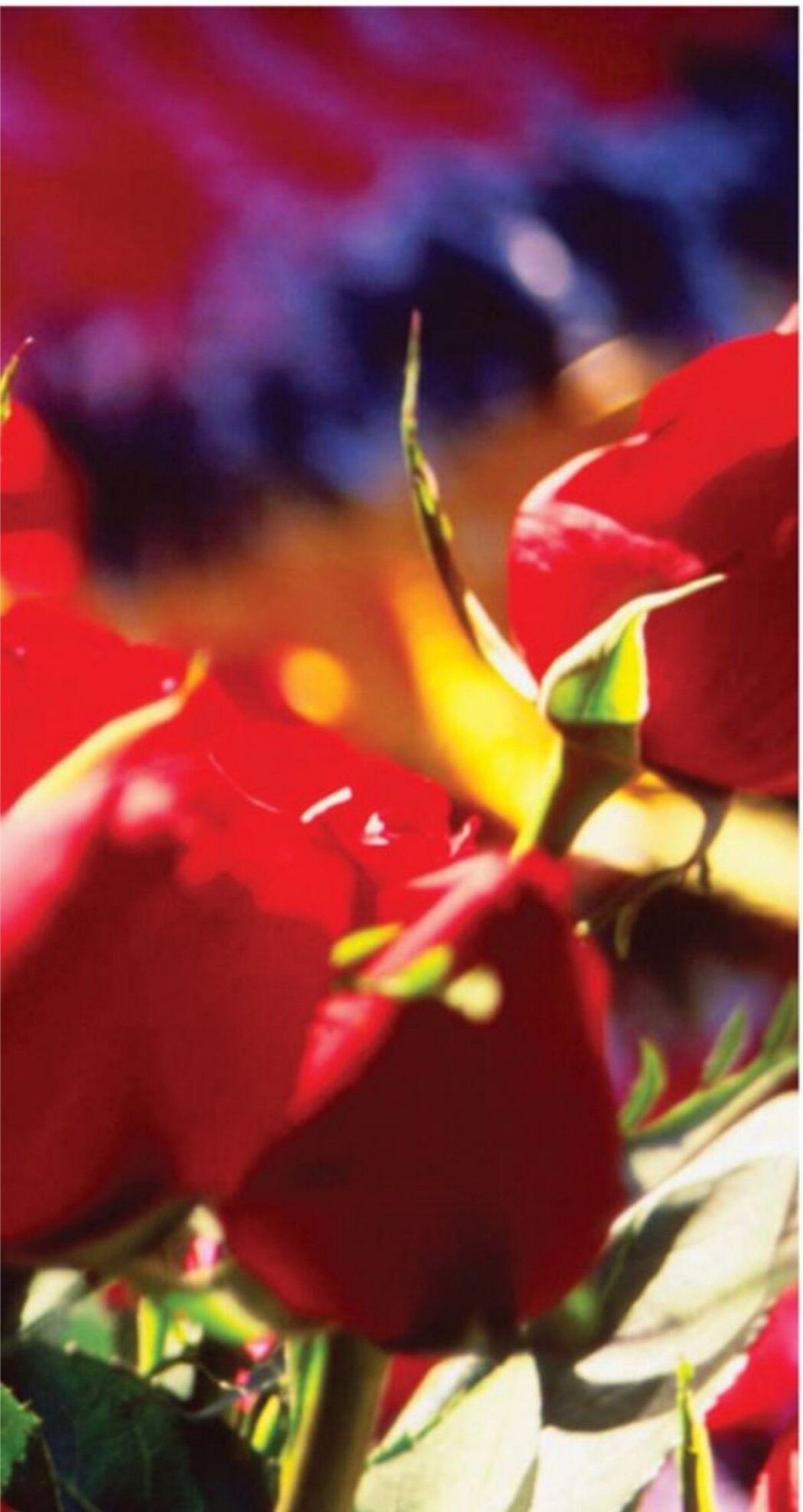
CHAPTER 4

Just Keep Truckin' On

The Grateful Dead came to an end in 1995 with the death of Jerry Garcia, but the music has lived on through new projects from remaining members and an influence that goes far beyond jam bands.

The Fare Thee Well concert in Chicago in 2015 celebrated 50 years of the Grateful Dead.

This memorial in New York's Central Park was one of many created by fans after Jerry's death.



JERRY GARCIA 1942–1995

Leaving a Love That Won't Fade Away

TIME paid tribute to the legend after his death from a heart attack at age 53.

BY RICHARD CORLISS

THE FLAGS WERE AT HALF STAFF IN SAN Francisco, and on one, a riot of colors replaced the traditional red, white, and blue. It was the first tie-dyed flag to fly in front of City Hall. The Bay Area was mourning the loss of its Papa Bear. Jerry Garcia, lead guitarist of the Grateful Dead, had died of a heart attack on the morning of August 9, 1995, at 53, after three decades of tunes and trips.

Thousands milled pensively at the corner of Haight and Ashbury streets, in the district where in 1965 the Dead first kicked open the doors of perception with their perky anthems to the Hippie Nation. The sweet sting of reefer smoke drifted from doorways as Jerry's kids paid the revered pothead a small toke of their esteem. A tree outside Ben & Jerry's ice-cream parlor (where a flavor is named Cherry Garcia) was adorned with photos, scarves, and roses, many roses.

At this impromptu shrine, a griever named Creek left a rock he had found on a nearby beach. "I hope Jerry's happy," he said. Creek, who has attended

nearly 200 Dead concerts, is 4 years old. The boy's mother, Kathy, 23, watched over him through her dreadlocks. "I hope he remembers this day," she murmured. "It's a special thing—to feel all the love."

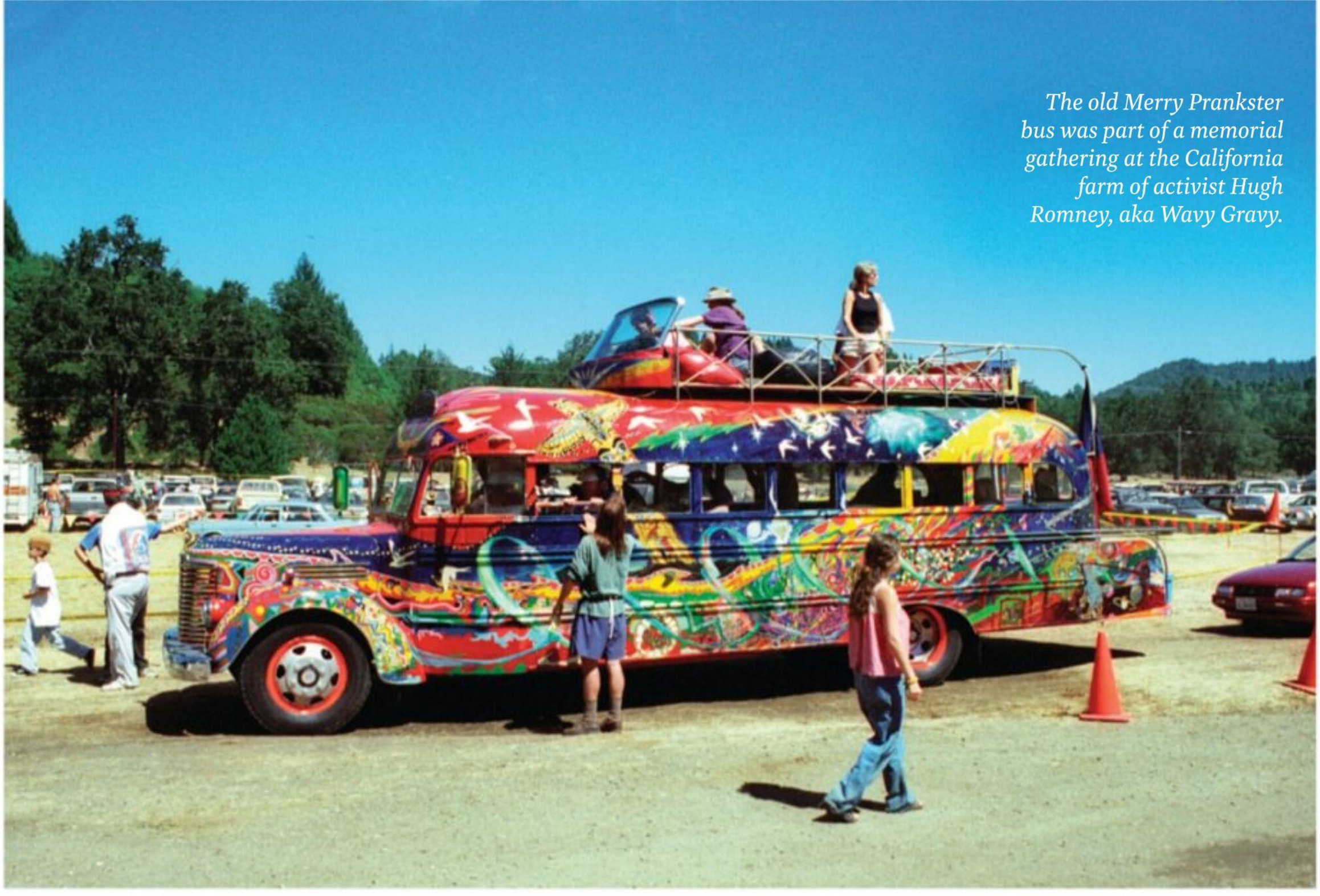
In cities all over the U.S., this gentle elegy was replicated. More than 4,000 people massed in Los Angeles' Griffith Park, passing out LONG LIVE THE DEAD bumper stickers in Merry Prankster green and creating a huge circle of drum players and mourner-celebrants. One sign read FARE THEE WELL, FARE THEE WELL, WE MISS YOU MORE THAN WORDS CAN TELL. In New York City's Central Park, 700 Deadheads gathered under the full moon at the memorial to another fallen idol, John Lennon. In Washington, D.C., where more than 300 souls converged on the Lincoln Memorial, Rush Jones, 25, spoke his anxiety in prime Dead style. Garcia's death marked "the end of a chapter of my life," he said. "Not with a dot, a period, but slammed shut, the ink still dribbling from the page."

Why all this lamentation, at Lennon or Presley volume, for the leader of a group that in 30 years had exactly one Top 10 single (1987's acerbic but hummy "Touch of Grey")? Well, for a few reasons. One is that the Dead were a phenomenon as a road band: They played before more people for more years than any combo in history. Another is that they were a time capsule for the elan of the '60s, hopeful and engaged, melodious and raucous. They were also the ragged champs of the art of improvisation. If rock musicians prove their wits by vamping, the Dead were Mensa masters. A single song, in myriad tonal variations, could go on for the better part of an hour—or the worse part, if inspiration was lacking that night. Deadheads came for that inspiration and found it in the roly-poly guitarist with a missing middle finger on his strumming hand. Garcia was the soul, the sound—by common consent, the head Dead.

"I CAN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING LIKE IT," SAYS Ken Kesey, the post-hipster novelist (*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*) and legendary ingester of psychedelic substances, who paints his old friend in heroic strokes. "Not Elvis, not John Lennon. The Beatles were great, but they were a studio band. And Elvis was great, but he was a good old boy, not a revolutionary. Jerry has been a revolutionary, a warrior, as long as I've known him. He battled for the American soul, out there on the edge of a dangerous frontier—battling the forces of the Grinch, the forces of darkness. It was a typical old flower-child battle for the forces of good and mercy and gentleness and mischief. You can't work that frontier without getting into some danger now and then. The dire wolf finally got him."

Garcia's influence spanned generations and social strata. This veteran of the counterculture had plenty of friends in high places. Vice President Al Gore gave the Garcia gang a White House tour, and

Left to right: Bob Weir, Mickey Hart, and Garcia's widow, Deborah Koons (flanked by her nieces), arrived at the funeral at St. Stephen's church in Belvedere, California.



The old Merry Prankster bus was part of a memorial gathering at the California farm of activist Hugh Romney, aka Wavy Gravy.

Tipper Gore hung out backstage at a Dead concert. Bill Weld, Massachusetts' Republican governor, last week wore a black armband in memory of his favorite guitarist. Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont was a fan and a friend; last summer, Leahy invited the Dead to the Senate Dining Room, where the band met that noted groupie Strom Thurmond. "Boy, Ah heah you're a rock star," the orange-haired solon said, pulling Garcia out of his chair with a jerking handshake and a whap on the arm. According to an observer, Garcia was nonplussed. "Even back when I dropped acid," he remarked, "I never had an experience like that."

Though he often treated his body as a laboratory for exotic pharmacological experiments, Garcia was admired—with sensible reservations—by the nation's most famous noninhaler, Bill Clinton. In an MTV interview, the president called him "a great talent." Referring to Garcia's heroin addiction, Clinton added, "He also had a terrible problem that was a legacy of the life he lived and the demons he dealt with. You don't have to have a destructive lifestyle to be a genius."

This is a lesson learned too late by many rock stars. They get high on the double dream of being a sensitive poet and a swaggering stud—Rimbaud and Rambo. Garcia, who was no friend of the Soloflex, nonetheless fit the mold of iconoblaster. In his drug taking he was a role model to some, a sacrificial totem to others. Wasn't he killing himself to create more beautiful music? That music was often swell, and as leader of the most fan-friendly band in rock, Garcia was a sort of secular saint of pop culture. But he stuffed himself with seductive toxins—and the myth of the bohemian king—until he burst. His epitaph could be three words: *Great. Full. Dead.*

Jerome John Garcia was born in San Francisco to a Spanish immigrant jazz musician and a nurse; they named the boy for songwriter Jerome Kern. When Jerry was 5, Joe Garcia died in a fishing accident. "He watched his father drown," Kesey notes. "That has always been in his music—the darkness, the next life. It reaches out, squeezes your shoulder, holds you close, and gives you strength to go on when you're grieving."

EXCEPT FOR PAINTING, WHICH HE LOVED AND worked at until his death, Garcia found studies intolerable. He didn't bother finishing high school, enlisting in the Army at 17. A number of AWOLs and courts-martial later, he was back on the San Francisco streets and hooked up with Robert Hunter, a coffeehouse habitué and, within a few

years, the lyricist for Garcia's songs. He also met Bob Weir and Bill Kreutzmann, who would become the Dead stalwarts on rhythm guitar and drums. They formed a jug band, Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions, and when they went electric in 1965—Bob Dylan having made it permissible for folkies to get plugged—they changed their name to the Warlocks. The year after, they were the Grateful Dead, from a folktale cycle about a reluctant corpse.

At first, the Dead was simply the nth band in San Francisco's rock scene. But the group could write catchy songs with irony and sidewise angst—jingles for jangled nerves. "Ripple," "Sugar Magnolia," "Uncle John's Band," and lots of others offer sophisticated pleasures in a simple form. (Other pieces, played in eccentric signatures, are closer to cool jazz.) Garcia lent humanity to the lyrics with his frail tenor. "His voice was a picture of the American past," says singer-composer Elvis Costello. "You could call it sepia-tinted. It's like one of those great old Civil War pictures that is so sharp it shocks you how much detail it holds, yet at the same time, it's not in color." As for Garcia's guitar playing, Costello says it "wasn't a question of virtuosity for its own sake, dazzling with millions of notes. It had a lovely tone and touch, and even when he played steel guitar, he added his personality and humor to it."

> "You're out there on the edge where it's . . . dangerous to your soul. And Garcia was on that edge for 30 years."
>
> —KEN KESEY

But mere musicianship doesn't make a band a legend. The Dead had this: Like no other group in the era of mega-money rock, Garcia's gang fused with their fondest listeners. In 1965, the group's first fan club, with all of three members, called itself the Golden Road to Unlimited Devotion—a name the Dead gratefully took as the title of the first song on their first album. Over time, Deadheads improvised their own vocabulary, infrastructure, and code of honor. Mythologist Joseph Campbell said they were the most recently developed tribe on the planet.

Sometimes the tribe acts like Attila's. Violence recently erupted in Indianapolis when ticketless Deadheads stormed a fence around the venue. A few old hands say the culture has become more dissolute and mean-spirited. But for every thug, there are a dozen Deadheads ripe for a religious experience. Hey, everyone has to believe in something. And in this woozy age—when the spiritual and the secular often blend, and born-again Christians are rivaled in fervor by devotees of Elvis, Mr. Spock, and Crow T. Robot—it was no surprise to see signs announcing that JERRY IS GOD.

One group of fans, the Church of Unlimited Devotion, had members, known as "Spinners," who performed dervish maneuvers at Dead shows, took vows of celibacy, and purported to worship Garcia as a divinity. He tepidly indulged them, once telling *Magical Blend* magazine, "I'll put up with it until they come for me with the cross and nails."

Grateful Dead lyricist John Perry Barlow, in a foreword to the indispensable handbook *Skeleton Key: A Dictionary for Deadheads,* describes the fans' playful ardor as "a religion without beliefs." That sounds about right. For most Deadheads, a concert was a church they attended not so much for the gospel as for the communion and community, the hymns and the incense. A giant mushroom cloud of hallucinogenics would lay over the crowd like a fuzzy blanket.

Once, Dead was God; now God is dead. With rock stars, such news is a shock but not a surprise. Garcia, who had a private funeral service (the guest of honor attired in black T-shirt and sweats), was the fourth Dead member to die. Three keyboard players preceded him: Ron "Pigpen" McKernan in 1973, of cirrhosis of the liver; Keith Godchaux in 1980, after a car crash; and Brent Mydland in 1990, after shooting a speedball—cocaine and morphine.

Garcia too was a suicidal adventurer. He did coke the way some people drink the stuff and romanced heroin to the end. He was in and out of hospitals and rehab centers; in 1986, he fell into a coma. In 1994, he collapsed at his home and promised to reform. But that was not in his nature. "You're out there on the edge," Kesey says, "where it's beyond dangerous to your life—it's dangerous to your soul. And Garcia was on that edge for 30 years. It's like when the king asked Mozart why he drank so much, and

Wavy Gravy was one of the thousands who gathered at a public memorial service for Garcia at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco.

Wolfgang said, 'Rock and roll is hot, dry work.' Who are we to argue with such an artist? It's like arguing with Picasso because he was horny."

It is the mundane task of the living to bury and praise the dead, and to keep on living. Weir, the Dead's pro tem leader, has not said if the band will continue with their scheduled tour. Their fans hope they do, if only as the best of all possible wakes.

And what will true Deadheads do? "These are people who've dedicated their lives to the nomadic existence of following the Dead," says Andrew Behar, whose Deadhead docufilm *Tie-Died* opens in theaters soon. "A lot of them have raised and taught their children in the back of school buses. With Garcia's death they may become like the Travellers in England, or Gypsies. But I don't think they'll just say goodbye to this spirit."

Most Dead fans have not turned themselves into career pilgrims. They go to the shows for good music and a great time. The older among them were kids of Garcia's generation, and in the '60s they enjoyed watching him living out their adolescent dream of cool: playing guitar, traveling the world, doing dope. Then, as these boomers faced up to middle age—working hard and working out, with only the occasional nostalgic joint at a Dead show—they could also see Garcia mature and decay. They were Dorian Gray, and he was the picture. His belly ballooned; his skin was looser; his hair turned a ratty touch of gray. He looked as if he existed on peanut butter and peyote buttons.

If life is indeed a song, then Garcia and most of his older fans played it in different styles: studio version and free-form concert improv. Because the fans learned to play life straight, they will get by. Because he saw life as a long jam session leading to harmony or anarchy, he died—long after he might have, long before he should have. But as a force for good music and good vibes, Garcia can go to heaven and keep on truckin'. As the song says, he will survive.

—Reported by Allison Andrews/San Francisco, Danielle Durkin and Jeffrey Ressner/Los Angeles, Tamala M. Edwards/Washington and David E. Thigpen/New York

Life After Jerry

For the last 30 years, the Dead's remaining members have kept the music alive as they hopped through a variety of new incarnations.

BY JED GOTTLIEB

THE MUSIC NEVER STOPPED. OR RATHER, it didn't stop for long.

After Jerry Garcia died on August 9, 1995, many thought the Grateful Dead was done for. But the river, while inevitably redirected, continued to flow. The remaining core band members—Bob Weir, Phil Lesh, Bill Kreutzmann, and Mickey Hart—have spent a large chunk of the past 30 years collaborating in a variety of projects that have kept the music alive.

Have the projects resulted in performances that were as transcendent as *Cornell 5/8/77*? Maybe not, but the various new incarnations have delivered plenty of sets beyond description. Here's the story, in its many chapters, of the band's life after Jerry.

THE OTHER ONES

The living Dead appeared to be done with one another after the loss of Jerry—Lesh even flirted with giving up the road for good. But three summers after Garcia's death, Weir, Lesh, and Hart joined forces for the first Grateful Dead reunion tour. Despite hiring aces such as piano wizard and longtime pal Bruce Hornsby, the lineup struggled to solidify. Lesh was in and out while touring with Phil Lesh & Friends, his supergroup that included members of other bands, including Phish and the Allman Brothers.

But when Kreutzmann came aboard in 2000 and Lesh rejoined in 2002, suddenly the Core Four were back on stage. And some felt they'd outlived the Other Ones moniker.

"This was the D-word," Hart said at the time. "We all looked around, but we didn't say much. But we all know when the dragon comes out. This was that—without Jerry, though."

This 2003 Dead show featured (left to right) Phil Lesh, Bill Kreutzmann, Bob Weir, Mickey Hart, and Jimmy Herring.

THE DEAD

The four didn't feel right calling themselves the Grateful Dead. Dropping "grateful" seemed a fitting compromise, and the change became official with a 2003 Valentine's Day performance at the Warfield in San Francisco. But the music was no compromise.

Finding their footing without Jerry, the group gelled with Jimmy Herring, the guitar god from Aquarium Rescue Unit, and Warren Haynes of the Allman Brothers and Gov't Mule (look up "August 11, 2004, Holmdel, NJ" to hear Haynes' sublime slide snake around the "Sugaree" melody line). The Dead became the definitive band carrying the catalog forward as they took on festival headlining spots, treks with Bob Dylan, two Barack Obama benefits, and thousands of nightly miracles. The

magic was there: "For me, it's the question mark that's really pulling me in…what's gonna happen? … When you walk out on the stage the possibilities are infinite every time," Lesh said.

But after the 2009 tour, Weir and Lesh went one way, the drummers another.

RHYTHM DEVILS

The Rhythm Devils actually started in the '70s as a way for Kreutzmann and Hart to stretch their drum jams and get weird (see their work on the *Apocalypse Now* soundtrack). In 2006, between Dead tours, when Weir was off with his solo band RatDog and Lesh was leading Phil & Friends, the two percussionists found fresh life in the music.

"The end of the last Dead tour, I'm gonna tell you the truth," Kreutzmann said to *Drum!* magazine in 2010, "I was getting bored."

Nothing to quash boredom like a gang of percussionists pounding out beats beside master improvisers such as Phish bassist Mike Gordon and San Francisco guitar ringer Steve Kimock.

FURTHUR

By 2009, Weir and Lesh had logged half a century with guitar greats from Garcia to Haynes, Trey Anastasio to Derek Trucks. This meant the pair could draft anyone for their first shared project without a Dead drummer. For Furthur—the name is a reference to the old touring bus of the Merry Pranksters from the 1960s—they went with the relatively unknown John Kadlecik, who had spent a decade channeling Jerry in tribute band Dark Star Orchestra.

"We were trying to head in an entirely new direction, so it made good sense to wipe the slate clean," Weir said at the time. "We discovered [Kadlecik] knew his way around our real footloose, fluid, sonic situation where a song can drift from key to key. And it was obvious he had big ears. He could hear what was going on and readily relate to it."

Furthur meant to liberate Weir and Lesh from the legacy of the Dead by lowering expectations (one reason the drummers were absent). But as the gravity of the Grateful Dead's 50th anniversary approached, the Core Four were pulled back together.

FARE THEE WELL

Deadheads met each reunion with gleeful yet tempered enthusiasm. Nothing approached the fever pitch surrounding Fare Thee Well: Celebrating 50 Years of Grateful Dead—five shows in the summer of 2015, two at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California, and three at Chicago's Soldier Field.

The Chicago concerts shattered the stadium's attendance records. Those who couldn't find a miracle ticket tuned in for pay-for-view parties at homes, bars, theaters, and drive-ins, setting another record with 400,000 subscriptions.

Left to right: Bill Kreutzmann, Trey Anastasio, Mickey Hart, Phil Lesh, Bob Weir, Jeff Chimenti, and Bruce Hornsby at Fare Thee Well in 2015.

The sky was lit up above Oracle Park in San Francisco for a 2023 Dead & Company show.

The original members rounded out the lineup with Anastasio and keyboardists Hornsby and Jeff Chimenti. While Anastasio was a bit of a polarizing pick, Weir made his support clear in Chicago by wearing a "Let Trey Sing" T-shirt on stage. Trey not only sang, but he added his lyrical guitar to highlights including a serpentine "China Cat Sunflower" and an earthy "Althea."

One fan considered it a quintessential Dead show. NBA Hall of Famer and noted Deadhead Bill Walton happily tweeted, "It's Saturday night, the Fourth of July, and we're in Chicago with the Grateful Dead—what could be better."

DEAD & COMPANY

Billed as the final performances by the Core Four, Fare Thee Well wasn't a goodbye but the end of another chapter.

After the landmark celebration, Weir stripped things down to a trio, touring with superproducer Don Was on upright bass and longtime collaborator Jay Lane on drums as Wolf Bros. Kreutzmann kept up with solo outfit Billy & the Kids. After-turning 80 in 2020, Lesh has slowed (a bit) but still gets together with his Friends a dozen times a year. But the Dead's most popular spin-off was its most unusual.

Pop-rock singer-songwriter John Mayer stumbled across "Althea" on a streaming station and was hooked—"I heard this riff and went, 'What's that?'" he said of starting down the rabbit hole. Always a great guitarist, Mayer didn't play like Garcia, but Weir, Hart, and Kreutzmann heard something in his approach. Mere months after Fare Thee Well, Mayer debuted with the three Dead alums at an Albany, New York, show on October 29, 2015.

Since teaming with a guy who graduated high school the year Jerry died, the Dead veterans have captured an entirely new generation of fans. Over 200-plus shows, Dead & Company have packed Fenway Park and Wrigley Field, Madison Square Garden and the Gorge Amphitheatre—and in May 2024, sans Kreutzmann, they began a residency at the Sphere in Las Vegas. Mayer has pushed the bandmates into fresh sonic spaces, honoring Jerry and reminding fans the Dead is for everyone.

Phish and the Dead

Trey Anastasio's band is, for better or worse, seen as Grateful Dead Jr.

BY NATHAN RABIN

Phish rocked out with Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings in Indio, California, in 2009.

WHEN PEOPLE CONSIDERED THE overlapping legacies of the Grateful Dead and Phish in advance of the 50th anniversary shows that featured Phish frontman Trey Anastasio performing with the surviving members of the Dead, it's worth noting that Phish never set out to create a scene. The band members aren't fiery idealists like Fugazi's Ian Mackaye or the Clash's Joe Strummer. They did not set out to change the world through their music. For Phish, music was, and always has been, a cause unto itself, and obviously one they feel most passionately about.

But a scene sprang up around Phish all the same, rooted in the band's devoted followers, the mind-expanding properties of various illegal, mood-altering substances, and epic, three-hour-plus concerts where the set list changed every night and solos could last a seeming lifetime—especially if you were on some really good acid.

Phish was creating something new, but its foundation was built upon the history of American popular music, and its scene owed a debt to the Grateful Dead that is hard to overstate. At Grateful Dead and Phish concerts, the parking lot was as much of a show as the concert itself, and the crowd was as entertaining and colorful as the musicians

on stage. The Grateful Dead called the weird little miniature cities that seemed to spontaneously evolve near their concerts "Shakedown Street." Phish fans call it "The Lot." But their purposes were similar: They were a place for true believers to commiserate and procure $1 bottles of water, and grilled cheese sandwiches, and drugs.

In their early days, Phish was eager to differentiate themselves from the generations that came before. They didn't want to be the Grateful Dead Jr.; they wanted to be Phish. For Anastasio and his bandmates, the constant comparisons were a blessing and a curse.

If nothing else, the Dead comparisons gave fans an easy shorthand for describing Phish. When I was writing my book *You Don't Know Me but You Don't Like Me,* about the seemingly antithetical followings of Phish and Insane Clown Posse, and people who weren't familiar with Phish would ask me what they were like, I would lazily but conveniently say they were a contemporary Grateful Dead.

But Grateful Dead comparisons also ensured that Phish was doomed to spend their career in Jerry Garcia's outsize shadow. So it's understandable that Phish and their fans might nurse ambivalent feelings about their most storied predecessors.

When Garcia died, it left a colossal hole in the lives of Deadheads. The surviving members of the Grateful Dead helped fill that hole by continuing to perform with one another in various combinations, but a lot of fans, particularly younger ones, gravitated toward Phish. Phish offered the shock of the new. Their music was rooted in the same improvisation and epic solos that defined the Grateful Dead, but they also had a playfulness and funkiness that set them apart. It's telling that Phish performs lots

Trey Anastasio jammed with Phil Lesh and Bob Weir at the 2015 Fare Thee Well show in Chicago. Opposite: Phish, like the Dead before them, often spend New Year's Eve with their fans, including this 2017 show at Madison Square Garden.

of covers during their concerts, but they don't cover the Grateful Dead as often as they do the Rolling Stones or Talking Heads.

As people age, however, the young Turk's need to distance himself from older generations is often replaced by a weary acceptance of his role in the grand parade of history and a reverence for those who came before. Phish are no longer kids but rather old pros who have been playing together longer than a lot of their fans have been alive.

By this point, Phish aren't competing with Jerry anymore; they're competing with their own past. Anastasio and the band have never nakedly rejected the early comparisons to the Dead, but they never wholeheartedly embraced them, either.

By the time of the 2015 show, however, Anastasio seemed to have reached a place of acceptance regarding Phish's relationship with the Grateful Dead, symbolized by his high-profile decision to join the remaining members of the Dead for an epic set of shows at Soldier Field that quickly emerged as a hot ticket of the summer.

The ridiculously high prices of the Anastasio/Dead shows were another sign that Anastasio and his band were no longer cocky young men with a scruffy following but a cultural institution, like the Dead, whose fans included powerful people with deep, deep pockets and way more money than I have. Though in keeping with the spirit of both acts, I planned to track down a bootleg of the Anastasio/Dead shows to experience vicariously what is a fundamentally personal and intimate experience: the delicate but powerful chemistry between a jam band and its fans.

Under Their Influence

The contemporary artists who owe a debt to the Dead include more than the usual suspects.

BY JED GOTTLIEB

IF YOU WERE LOOKING TO CHRONICLE THE enormous influence of the Grateful Dead on the music world, the most obvious place to start might be the plethora of tribute bands. One estimate puts the number at 750, and the variations are seemingly endless: Grateful Dub does the Dead reggae style. Grateful Drag features drag queens singing "Bertha." Grateful for Biggie mashes up the Dead and Notorious B.I.G.

The next most obvious sphere of Dead influence is the jam bands, and there are plenty of those—Phish, Umphrey's McGee, and Tedeschi Trucks Band are among the leading heirs in that regard.

But the Dead's impact also shows up in more unexpected places. Iconic indie acts, post-punk shoegazers, and hipster bands have become contemporary gateway drugs for a new generation to discover "High Time," "Casey Jones," and "Truckin.'"

WILCO

The prototype of the 21st-century indie band might seem an unlikely act to connect to the Grateful Dead. But band leader Jeff Tweedy has always loved delicate folk and twangy country rock—the kind the Dead demonstrated mastery of on such studio albums as *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty*. And as Wilco evolved away from Americana, the band also learned to love the jam.

In 2004, Wilco added experimental jazz guitar guru Nels Cline to their roster and showed they could crescendo as if they were performing "Help>Slip>Frank" at San Francisco's Great American Music Hall in '75 (for a prime example of Wilco in this mode, see the song "Impossible Germany" from their album *Sky Blue Sky*).

Tweedy and Cline made their Deadhead status official by sitting in for a set with Phil Lesh & Friends in 2022 at the Sacred Rose Festival in Chicago, performing "Franklin's Tower," "Ripple," "U.S. Blues," and many other Dead tunes. They dubbed the one-off supergroup Philco.

MY MORNING JACKET

Since forming in Kentucky in the late '90s, Jim James' My Morning Jacket has dug into some serious hippie vibes. The band can deliver psychedelic guitar workouts, jangly alt country, and late '60s California folk, and like the Dead, they are at their best when they are on stage. But for the longest time, James just couldn't get into the Dead. That changed when, after a mid-

My Morning Jacket (below) and Wilco have both shown an affinity for the Dead.

Members of the National (left) were the unlikely force behind a 10-LP tribute, while Vampire Weekend (right) has become more Dead-like as the band has evolved.

2000s show in Boulder, Colorado, James' drummer recommended he pick up *American Beauty.*

"I popped *American Beauty* into my CD walkman and pressed play: 'Look out of any window, any morning, any evening, any day…' something about it, for the first time, started to hit me," James wrote in the liner notes of the 50th anniversary box set of the album. "The possibility of it all…I've always been into a wide variety of music, but there was just something about this music I had never felt before."

Listen to the ballads on MMJ's 2011 album *Circuital,* and the *American Beauty* influence is clear. Songs such as "Slow Slow Tune" and "Wonderful (The Way I Feel)" draw off the magic of classics such as "Ripple" and "Box of Rain."

THE NATIONAL

At first blush, the National, an indie rock band formed in Brooklyn in 1999, sound nothing like the Grateful Dead. On second listen—well, nope, they still don't. And yet, no modern rock band has done more to help bring the Dead's music to virgin ears.

In 2016, the National's Aaron and Bryce Dessner put together a six-hour, 59-track tribute box set called *Day of the Dead.* The sprawling 10-LP package—part of the Red Hot organization's charity albums produced to fight HIV/AIDS—features a who's who of cool kids: the Flaming Lips, Jenny Lewis, Kurt Vile and the Violators, and dozens more. It turned out the Dessner brothers were longtime Deadheads who were a bit too young to have seen the band with Jerry. The brothers recruited the rest of the musicians in the National to act as a sort of house band on many of the cuts in the box set.

They knew they were on to something after they played with Bob Weir and the Dead camp gave the project its stamp of approval. "When they blessed it, we thought, 'How could we not do this?'" Aaron said. For the closing track of the boxed set, Weir and the National perform together on "I Know You Rider," a favorite Dead cover.

VAMPIRE WEEKEND

Vampire Weekend took flak for drawing too much inspiration from Paul Simon's *Graceland* early in their career. But nearly 20 years on from the debut of his buzz band, leader Ezra Koenig started pulling from a very different vibe. Recent live sets have included bits of Phish and Dead songs.

When their 2019 album *Father of the Bride* came out and drew Dead comparisons with its sound, Koenig ackowledged in an interview with Pitchfork that he liked the band but hedged and said his true inspiration was "a memory from my youth of a place like Wetlands," a Deadhead-friendly New York club in the 1990s.

But in 2024, he went from acknowledging to embracing. At a recent show at New York's Capitol Theatre, the band stretched its tune "Cape Cod Kwassa Kwassa" into a 30-minute workout with new jam kings Goose. The same month, the band turned Dead live staple "Peggy-O" into a dreamy whisper of a song when they performed it at the SiriusXM studios.

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Grateful Dead

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Bruce Hornsby, Jeff Chimenti, Mickey Hart, Bob Weir, Phil Lesh, Bill Kreutzmann and Trey Anastasio at the Fare Thee Well concert in Chicago in 2015.

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Meet the Dead
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How It All Began
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Let There Be Songs
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Just Keep Truckin' On
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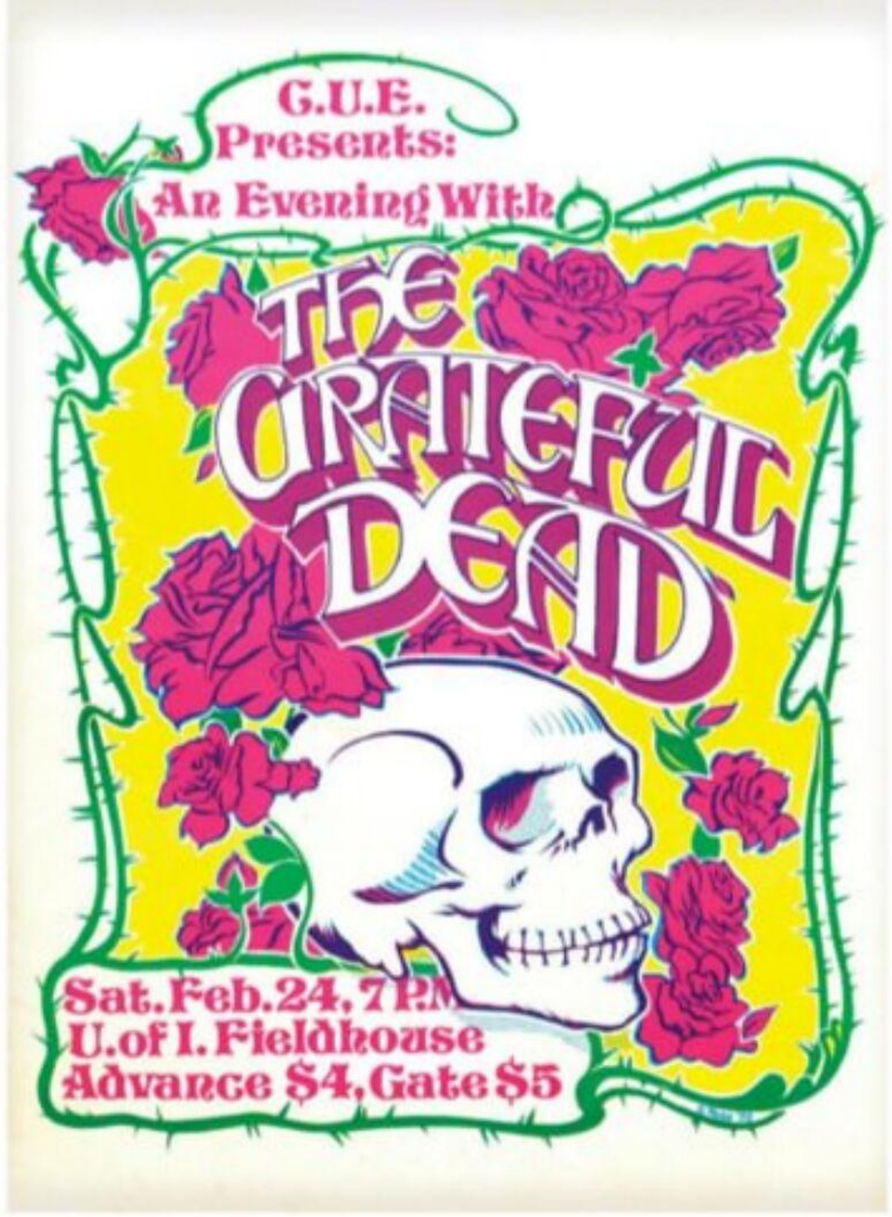
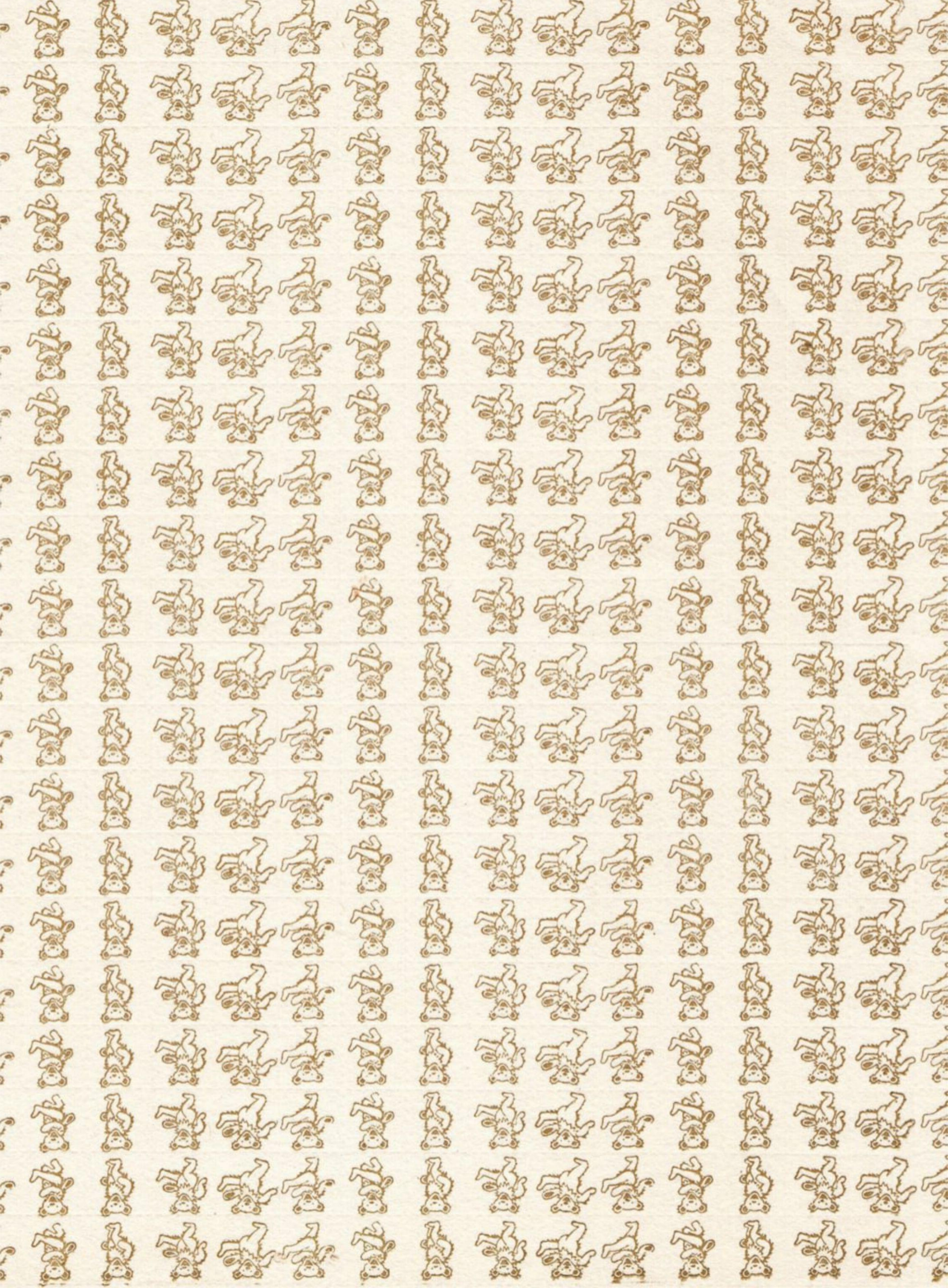


The Look of (the Summer of) Love

The Grateful Dead's concert posters impart the vibes of the 1960s almost as readily as their music. The top right poster is from 1967, the bottom left poster is from 1970 (tickets were three dollars!), and the bottom right one advertised a 1973 show at the University of Iowa. The top left poster, for a 1966 concert at San Francisco's Avalon Ballroom, is perhaps their most iconic. It was cocreated by Stanley Mouse, a graphic artist and fellow Haight-Ashbury denizen. Rock promoter Bill Graham once said, "If I were to pick half a dozen of the definitive 1960s people, Stanley Mouse would be one of them."



Come Hear

Deadheads showed their strength in numbers as they flocked to Las Vegas for the 2024 Sphere residency of Dead & Company.